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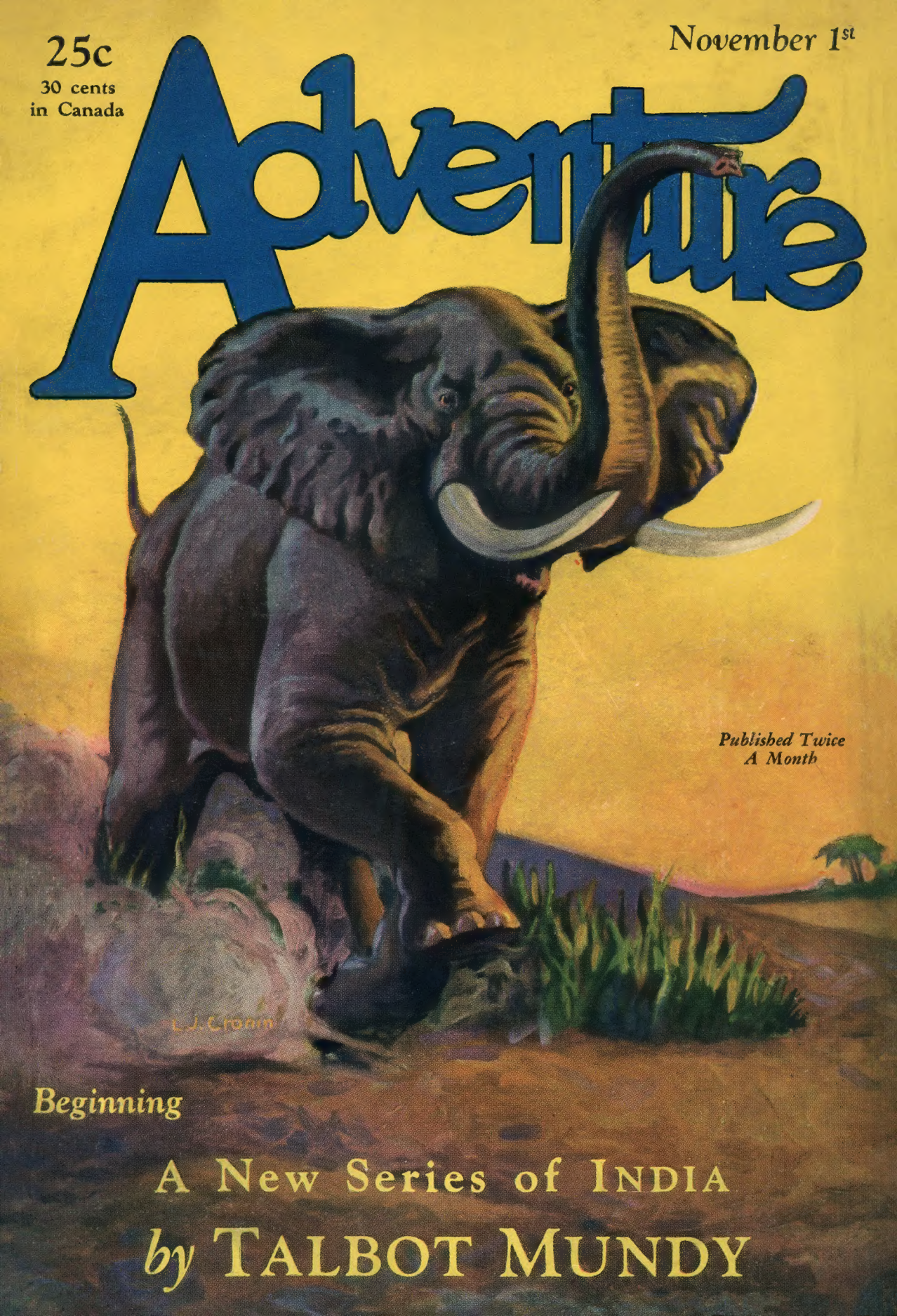
Adventure



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by TALBOT MUNDY

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AFTER EVERY MEAL

Who was the Man in the Iron Mask?

THIS mysterious prisoner on the ramparts of an island prison has always excited the most intense interest. What was the life which he exchanged for one silent as the grave? What had he done? Who was he? What was his past? The dissolute life of a courtier? Or the devious ways of an intriguing diplomat? Had some fair one in the hallowed circle of royalty loved not wisely but too well? Why during all these years has he remained the greatest of all mysteries?

NONE DARED TELL SECRET

Some believe that he was a twin or even elder brother of Louis XIV, a true heir to the crown hidden from the time of his birth. Others think that he was the eldest illegitimate son of Charles II; or that he, and not Louis XIII, was the actual father of Louis XIV. Some have thought that he was the son of Buckingham and the Queen of France; others, that he was the son of Louis XIV and De la Vallière. To have revealed it would have cost anyone his life. The regent admitted when drunk that the prisoner was a son of Anne of Austria and Mazarin. Louis XV refused to tell Madame de Pompadour. Madame Campan stated that Louis XVI did not know the secret. De Chamillart on his deathbed declined to reveal the secret.

MASKED—HIS FACE HIS SECRET

In 1669 there was hurried across France a masked man whose identity was shrouded in mystery. Never has a prisoner been guarded with such vigilance and with such fear of his story becoming known. He was taken to an island prison where the governor carried his food to him; a confessor saw him once a year, but no other visitor ever laid eyes on him. *He was always masked—his face alone would tell his secret.*

He was well treated; supplied with fine clothing, books, and served from silver dishes. The governor stood before him uncovered, and addressed him as *Mon prince*. When the prisoner wrote messages on his white linen he was supplied only with black.

He is not a myth, as is proven by letters between Louvois, the minister, and Saint-Mars, the governor of the prison. These are all written in veiled language; never once is he given a name. No letter mentions his crime or whether he had committed one.

SECRET EVEN AFTER DEATH

This horrible punishment ended when, in 1703, the most mysterious of all prisoners died and was buried in the dead of night, under a false name, and given a false age.

His cell was carefully painted so that any message he might have written would be covered up, and everything he used was destroyed lest any clew might be left. Thus vanished a man whose name and identity was unknown even to his gaoler—some think even to the prisoner himself.

WHY WAS HIS LIFE PRESERVED?

What was the reason for all this secrecy? What crime, if any, did this man, evidently of exalted rank, commit that he should be buried alive for life? Why did the king preserve the life of this prisoner? Why did he not have him put to death? The subject becomes more mysterious as we investigate.

LONG BURIED RECORDS FOUND

The mystery has always terrified the imagination and excited speculation. With the nineteenth century came an opportunity to search long-buried records. Dumas did so and told the whole story in one of the volumes of the strangest and most curious set of books ever published which he called

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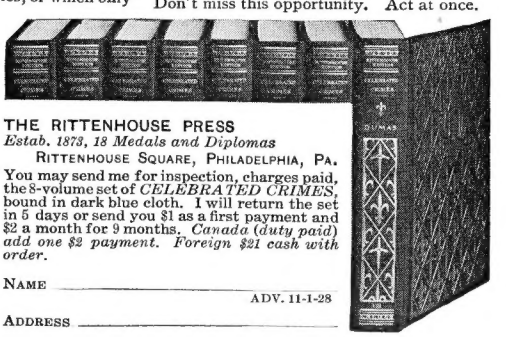

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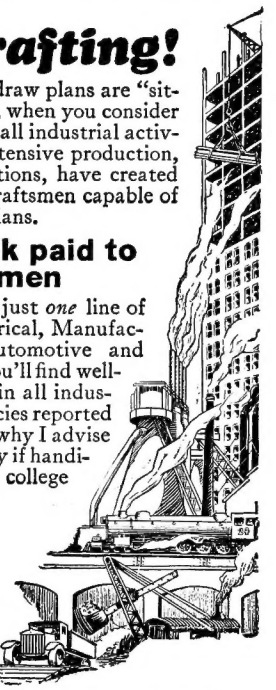

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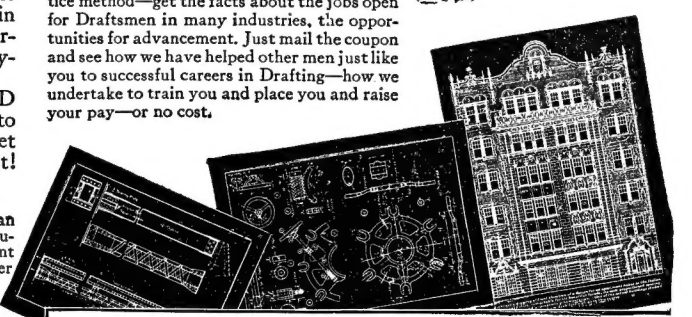

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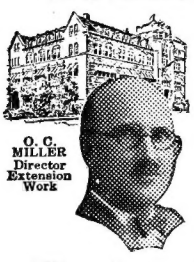

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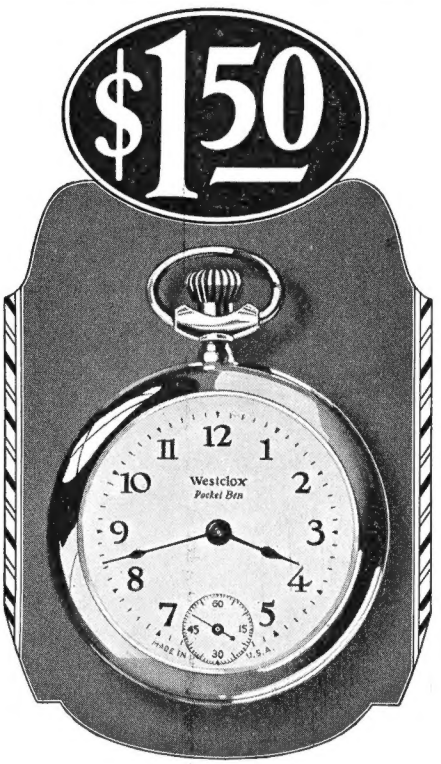

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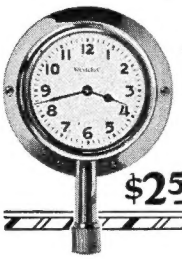

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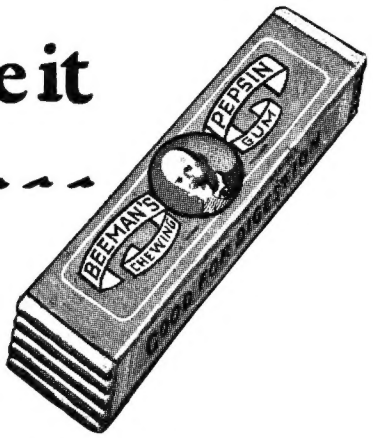

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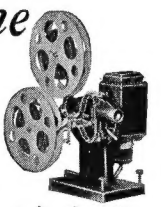

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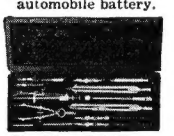

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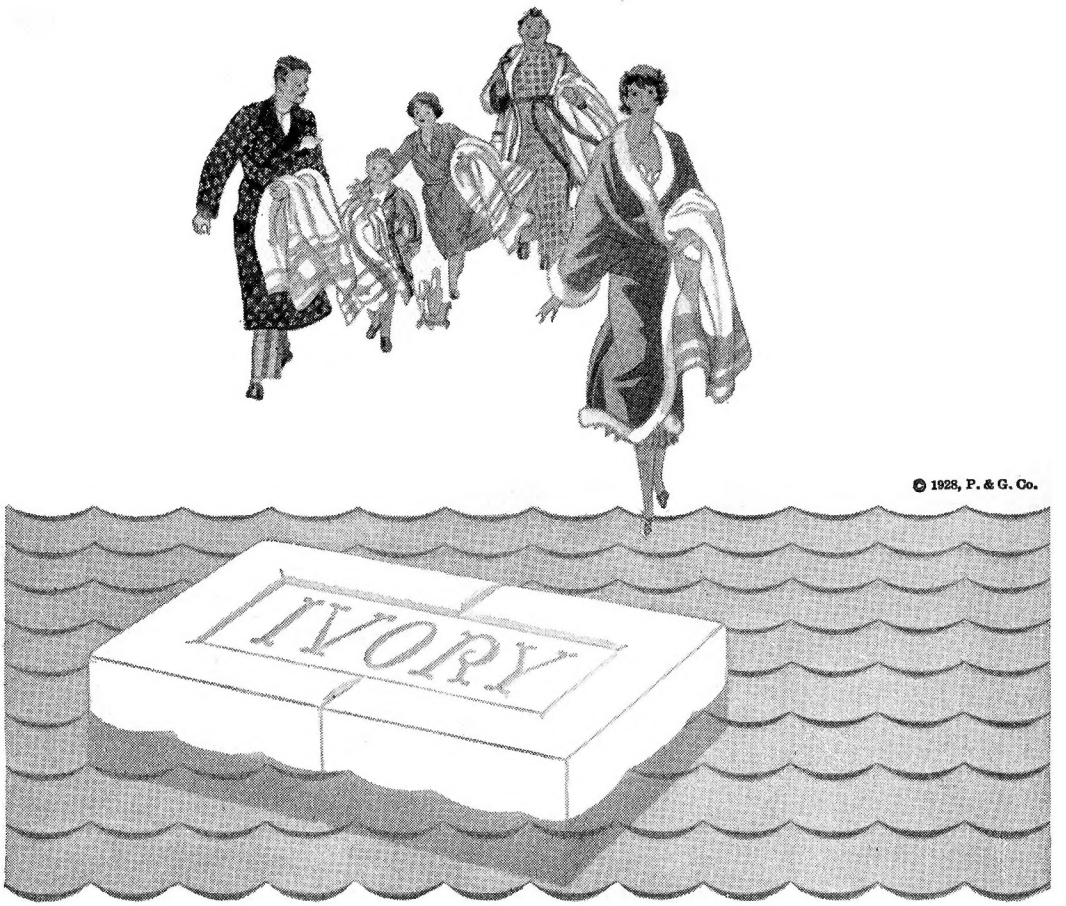

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TALBOT MUNDY *returns to our pages*

with a sprightly tale of an American taxi driver in the sacred precincts of India

JUSTICE, destiny and love, these three are blind, says one of the lesser known commentators on the Laws of Manu. But he may have written petulantly, like a buzz fly fastened to the Wheel of Things.

At all events, none but a royal rogue and a few hundred thousand simpletons so much as dreamed that destiny had any far seen purpose when it picked up Benjamin Quorn in Philadelphia and plunged him, unprepared, as far as any one could tell, into the polychromatic whirlpool of Narada, thousands of miles away from the United States.

A want ad column in a Sunday paper touched off a spring in Quorn's imagination with a suddenness, and changed his career with a swiftness which might suggest that some unseen mechanism was at work. What more simple and ready tool could there be for destiny than a Sunday want ad column? And there was Quorn's face.

Quorn's face puzzled Quorn himself as much as any one. It was an ordinary sort of face at first glance, but people who looked twice usually looked a third and a fourth time; after that, they usually looked away and utterly forgot him. Some people thought him a crook, so much imponderable purpose peered forth from his eyes; others thought he might be a poet, or a musician, or a satyr, or an anarchist. Whereas Quorn was a man of conservative tendency, who did not altogether approve of music, and who had not the patience to read poetry.

He led an unsatisfactory, rather sordid life, full of disappointment and hardship, but had managed to retain, if not hope, at least a sort of stubborn optimism, although he knew that his eyes—they had the amber unbelief in ethics of a he-goat's

The Wheel of Destiny

—and something else elusive, vague and undefinable about his not unhandsome face, had kept him from making his way in the world. After trying numbers of sorts of employment he settled down at last to driving a taxicab.

Thus far Quorn is comprehensible. And so is destiny—almost. But why did Quorn like elephants? And *why* did elephants like Quorn? He could not stay away from them when a circus came to town. They fascinated him. It seemed he fascinated them. When questioned about it he would usually scratch his head, just over the pineal gland; which gesture apparently had nothing to do with elephants or destiny, or anything else except thoughtless habit.

Elephants, of course, suggest a link with India, although elephants, so far as any one can prove, had nothing whatever to do with Quorn's decision to go to Narada. There was nothing said about them in the want ad column, and like most other people, he did not even know where Narada was until he got there. India and mystery to him were synonymous terms, as they are to Indians themselves and to everybody else. Narada is the most mysterious part of India, the very heart of it.

HISTORIANS, philosophers, mystics, missionaries, poets and politicians have invented countless explanations of the heart of India, and the bursting libraries are full of books about it, but they all avoid Narada. It remains unknown. Narada regards India as India regards the rest of us, and as the rest of us regard the Chinese laundryman, concerning whom the more we think we know the less chance we have of understanding.

The tiny state contains one city large enough to amuse a magnificent rajah who rates a salute of one gun and a roll of eighteen drums. Nobody knows why, and nobody cares, but when, once in three years, he pays his official visit to the British viceroy, he rides all the way to Delhi—a journey of three weeks—on the back of an elephant, whose howdah is heavy with gold and silver. He returns to Narada on a different elephant, to be disinfected very expensively by Hindu priests, he being nevertheless not a Hindu by religion but an Animist so far as anybody can discover. But then, what would life be worth without enigmas? The priests can make him do incredibly severe and expensive penances whenever he breaks a single one of their

complicated caste laws—and that is often.

There is an army consisting of a hundred men, most of whom do sentry duty in the palace precincts, not that robbers are expected to break in otherwise, but because there is nothing else for them to do and it keeps the soldiers out of mischief. They have a colonel and they look fierce, because they dye their whiskers and they eat rice with plenty of pepper. They frown savagely at strangers who come in curiosity to examine the royal treasures, which are what a guide book would describe as priceless. Mention of the treasures has, however, been omitted from all guide books because of an ancient treaty between the government of India and the state of Narada, under the terms of which no investigation of antiquities and no Christian missionaries are permitted.

The latter clause of the treaty was long evaded by a missionary sect whose persuasion is so peaceful that even Narada's sensitive nerves were hardly conscious of the quiet intrusion. For more than fifty years a mission flourished, more or less—or, at all events, there was a mission. The Reverend John Brown, adopting something of Narada's method, which included subtlety and breaking laws while seeming to obey them, bought an ancient palace from a dissolute heir to the throne who had been banished.

He converted the palace, if nothing else. Behind its greenish limestone garden walls, he modernized the buildings. He imported plumbing, libraries and school desks. He established an elementary school of medicine that would have caused a riot if he had not possessed more than normal tact. He called it a revival of ancient magic and offered to supply the Hindu priests with free drugs in any quantity; so that numbers of babies began to be born with unafflicted eyes, and gratitude grew out of that.

A junior priest of an obscure temple, after being suitably protected by incantation, was sent to hang a garland around the Reverend John Brown's neck. It created a scandal, of course, but the Hindu hierarchy lived it down, even though it turned out that the missionary's tenets included such dreadful blasphemy as strong denunciation of the burning of the dead. The Reverend John Brown converted all Narada finally to the use of quinine, and malaria almost vanished. Then he died. He was cremated, Hindu fashion, to lay his ghost before any one could interfere, and his ashes were returned to Philadelphia.

DEATH has a way of stopping more than one clock, and of inspiring much diplomacy. In between sighs of relief at having no more missionary in their midst, it occurred to some one that there would be trouble about that cremation, and somebody else thought of the treaty with the Indian government. It was decided to set a backfire, so to speak, and a minister was dispatched by elephant, with sundry secretaries and a band of music, to Delhi to demand that the illegal mission should be withdrawn.

Meanwhile, half of the rajah's army guarded the place, keeping out every one except the birds and bats and sacred monkeys, while the mails went to and fro across several oceans and the international cable carried streams of urgent messages that were taken down by a babu by the name of Bamjee, who knew little and cared less about the mission and the dead John Brown, but who had an eye for opportunity. He mixed up everything, not without some profit to himself, since he bought a Ford car shortly afterward and went into business as purchasing agent for the rajah of Narada. So there was confusion and then compromise.

The mission buildings were allowed to stand as John Brown left them, but there should be no more activity. As a graceful concession on the part of the government of his Highness the Rajah of Narada, the trustees of the mission were allowed to send from the United States and to keep on the spot at their own expense one caretaker, who should have no duty and no privileges other than to see that the mission property was not disturbed; he

might remain there until the mission property was sold; and since there was no prospect whatever of a purchaser, it was understood that the caretaker's job might be permanent.

Accordingly a man of parts was selected in Philadelphia by the trustees, by advertisements. Benjamin Quorn was the chosen applicant. He was given a contract, sworn before the vestrymen and a notary public, and dispatched post haste to India, second class.

HE CAME and lived in the great gate house with a one eyed servant by the name of Moses, an Eurasian, and they two grew gray arguing about Noah's deluge, and the curious statement in the Book of Genesis that light was created before the sun, and what not else. Quorn considered Moses and all his neighbors, from the rajah to the untouchables who swept the street, as heathen; it was the only word he had for them, but it was no worse than the word they had for him, and there was no spite wasted. He became such a well known figure, neatly shaven, rather bent, wandering without much apparent curiosity through sun baked, crowded streets in a ready made Palm Beach suit and a rather soiled white helmet, that soon people took no more notice of him than they did of the sacred *neem* trees lining the streets, or of the sacred monkeys catching fleas off one another, or of the sacred bulls thrusting their way through crowded alleys to better the temple dole by stealing grain from the bags in the grain seller's open fronted shops, or of the sacred peacocks strutting and screaming from walls that guarded sacred mystery.

So many things are sacred in Narada that it is simplest to take the Apostle Paul's advice and hold that there is nothing common or unclean, not even the temple dirt.

And when men had ceased to notice Quorn they grew almost friendly, as men grow friendly with remembered landmarks. They ceased to become darkly silent when he drew near. Moses, having not much else to do, was at great pains to teach him the language, so that after a while he was able to talk with strangers in the street. Then a sort of bewilderment took hold of him, a wordless wonder. It sank into his consciousness that what had hindered him at home was here an asset. It appeared that men understood that strangeness in his eyes, which he himself did not understand.

But the East guards understanding cautiously and hides it with all sorts of subterfuge. When he strolled in the great roofed market place it meant nothing to him that a thousand eyes glanced at the wall at the end. It did not mean much, even, when one day he and Moses had gone marketing together and Moses, half Oriental, half inclined in consequence to keep all secrets hidden, but equally half inclined to lay them bare, led him to that end wall where the sunlight played on broken carving. It was possibly a thousand years old and there was not enough left of it to tell a connected story, even to an antiquarian; but there was an obvious elephant, the lower half of a woman who had jewels on her feet and ankles, and the head and shoulders of a man in a turban.

Farther along the wall appeared the same man riding on the elephant with the lady up behind him in a funny little howdah; but most of the rest of the picture was beyond recognition.

"They say you look like that man," remarked Moses.

Quorn stared, unaware that he was being watched through the corners of hundreds of eyes. The market had almost ceased its chaffering.

"Some heathen god?" he asked at last.

He noticed the resemblance to himself, but it meant nothing to him. It was mere coincidence.

"No, not a god," said Moses. "Some old personage of veree olden time."

Then the Western half of Moses—the half that could not keep secrets—stole a moment's freedom from the other half that could.

"Once," he said, "there was a man named Gunga, whom the gods loved. He

was brave and obedient, and yet not absolutelee obedient; and because of his braveree the gods selected him to rescue a princess who was living her life in durance vile. So he came for her on an eleephant, who also was selected by the gods. But because this man Gunga was willing, and yet onlee partlee obedient, he did not finish what he had to do. He got down from the eleephant to see about something or other, so the eleephant supposed he had become faint hearted, and therefore slew him, because an eleephant is not a person of much self-restraint.

"Consequentlee the princess was recaptured by her proud and angree parent and she lived all the rest of her life in the durance vile out of which she had hoped to escape. For all of which the gods were sorree. So the gods said that some day Gunga must reeturn to finish what he had begun, and that carving was made on the wall as a reeminder. That is the legend.

"Now these people say you look like Gunga."

"They're heathen. They're talking bunk," said Quorn, and turned away with his hands in his pockets.

"Oh yes, certainlee," said Moses, and withdrew, tortoise fashion, into the Oriental half of him that was ashamed of the half that tells secrets.

BUT THAT same day, as if a trigger had snapped and unseen mechanism moved again, Quorn met the Rajah of Narada and made history—or made it possible for history to happen, which is really as much as Napoleon ever did. Napoleon and Quorn made holes for history to happen through—the difference being that Napoleon knew what he was doing, but that Quorn did not.

It was the rajah's fault. Three of the rajah's wives, accepting astrological advice and knowing that the rajah's moon was in a quarter where it would upset his judgment, had chosen the preceding night to air their views at great length on the subject of a contemplated addition to their number, of whom they had heard rumors. They considered he already had enough wives. And his royal daughter, aged nineteen, with modernist views of her own acquired from reading modern books, who had refused to marry anybody not of her own choosing, and who had not yet chosen because she was always kept behind the *purdah* and not allowed to meet anybody, had added worse than noise—perplexity.

For there were visiting Narada at the moment emissaries from his serene Highness the Maharajah of Jamnuggar—an eighteen gun man of enormous wealth and influence, whose royal ancestral tree was traceable for seven thousand years. He condescended to suggest, through these semiofficial intermediaries, that he might be willing to lay his polygamous heart in the dust at the feet of the princess Sankyamuni.

That would manifestly be a fine alliance. The infernal nuisance of it was that these semiofficial representatives were too inquisitive. Like almost all gay gentlemen, the Maharajah of Jamnuggar was a stickler for the very strictest social conventions in so far as they concerned his own womenfolk.

If he should learn that the Princess Sankyamuni held modern views and could only be restrained with difficulty from escaping from the palace precincts and showing her beautiful face to strangers, not only would negotiations be called off but such malicious scandal would be spread by the disappointed and disgusted Jamnuggar as would cause the Rajah of Narada's face to blush the color of his turban. He would almost prefer to have the girl killed, although he was too lazy to wish to murder any one, even his own daughter, except on the deadliest provocation.

It was easy enough to keep Jamnuggar's representatives from speaking with, or even from seeing the princess, since custom provided that royal lovers should not meet each other even by proxy until the wedding day. An expert well instructed as to the type of beauty that the Maharajah of Jamnuggar most admired had been employed to paint the lady's

portrait without seeing her. But nobody could keep servants from talking, or the princess either, and she had talked loud enough last night, and long enough to provide every single servant of the scores within the palace with enough gossip to last almost a lifetime. So the rajah rode forth looking for a victim for his royal anger.

He was a rather handsome man, that rajah, and magnificently horsed. He looked rather too lazy to be dangerous, though capable of fighting like a panther if stirred deeply enough or bored beyond the point of patience, and it was noticeable that his mounted attendants kept well out of range of his riding whip. He wore a blood red turban, possibly suggestive of his inner feelings, and it was fastened with a diamond brooch reputed to be worth nearly as much as the Koh-i-noor.

QUORN had sent Moses home to chase pariah dogs and sacred monkeys out of the mission compound. He was still puzzling over the heathenish suggestion that the stone face carved on the wall was like his own, and as usual when puzzled he grew discontented. When discontented he went to see the elephants. There was something about the big brutes that reminded him, nowadays, of foggy mornings in Philadelphia.

They stood picketed at wide intervals beneath enormous *neem* trees in a compound surrounded by a high stone wall, tossing up dust with their trunks in a heat haze like a golden veil and swaying to elephantine music utterly inaudible to man—perhaps the music of the spheres.

He had struck up quite an acquaintance with the biggest one, who was chained by one leg to the picket farthest from the compound gate, a monster named Asoka, a possessor of immeasurable dignity.

The rajah, followed by several attendants, rode into the compound when Quorn had been standing studying Asoka for some ten or fifteen minutes. Brute and man were perfectly contented to look dumbly at each other; neither betrayed a trace of any emotion that he may have felt. Asoka swayed and fidgeted. Quorn stood still. A mahout watched them both from a distance squatting beneath another *neem* tree with his naked brats around him, all dependent for their living on the elephant and all equally ungrateful, but nevertheless aware of obligations.

Quorn's back being toward the compound gate, he did not see the rajah, who occupied himself during the next few minutes with the congenial task of cursing the ancestors, the immediate relatives and the person of the compound foreman, to whom he gave reluctant and ungracious permission to remain living. Meanwhile, something pulled the trigger of the mechanism that propels events.

FOR THE first time in his entire experience of elephants, Quorn had the curiosity to find out whether or not Asoka would obey his orders. He commanded the monster to lie down. To his astonishment, like a big balloon descending with the gas let out, the elephant collapsed and thrust a forefoot out for Quorn to sit on. Quorn did not understand that gesture, but he sensed the invitation and drew nearer. Then, smiling at his own foolishness, wondering what Philadelphia would think of it, he vaulted on to the great brute's neck and thrust his knees under the ears, as he had seen mahouts do. He felt younger and ridiculous, but rather pleased. He thought he could imagine worse things than to have to ride elephants all day long.

It was at that moment, just as Quorn was mounting, that the mahout's brats saw the rajah riding forward down the track between the trees. All five yelled with one shrill voice to Asoka to salute the heaven born. Quorn held on, crying—

"Hold her, now there, steady!"

But Asoka knew no English. Quorn tried to think of ways to get down, but his nerves were suddenly, and utterly for the moment, paralyzed as Asoka raised a

forefoot, threw his trunk in air, and screamed the horrible salute that Hannibal, viceroys, kings, some wise men and a host of fools have been accepting as their due since elephants were first made captive. It sounded like paleolithic anguish.

It was a new, young horse that the rajah rode, one not yet broken to the voice of elephants. He reared. The rajah spurred him. Four and thirty elephants at pickets scattered up and down the compound trumpeted a gooseflesh raising chorus; they had been taught to do that when Asoka set example, each of them raising a forefoot and stamping the dusty earth, so that a golden cloud went up through which the sun shone like a great god, angry.

Terror, aggravated by whip and spurs and by the cries of the mahouts, became a thousand devils in the horse's brain. Strength, frenzy, speed and will were given to him to escape from that inferno. He shed the rajah as a cataclysm sheds restraint. He went as life goes fleeing from the fangs of death—a streak of sun lit bay with silver stirrups hammering his flanks, and a broken rein to add, if it were possible to add to anything so absolute and all inclusive as that passion to be suddenly somewhere else.

Asoka trumpeted again. The rajah lay sprawling in dirt, too angry to be stunned, and much too mortified to curse even his attendants whom panic assured that their master's royal anger would be vented on themselves. They were too conscious of far too many undetected crimes against him to feel able to defy injustice. They must justify themselves. So some fool struck Asoka as the source of the catastrophe, struck him across his friendly, sensitive, outreaching trunk with a stinging whalebone riding whip.

Then genuine disaster broke loose naturally—upward of five tons of it, with Quorn on top. A green and golden panorama veiled in smelly haze, with sacred monkeys scampering like bad thoughts back to where the bad thoughts came from, wherever that is; and a crowd of frantic horses, shouting mahouts and screaming children darting to and fro like stokers of inferno, was opened, split asunder and left gasping at Asoka's great gray rump, that had an absurd tail like a weary, elongated question mark suggesting that all speculation was useless as to what would happen next.

The unbelievable had happened anyhow. Never before, in more than forty years, had Asoka broken faith by snapping that futile ankle ring. He had always played fair. He had pretended the rusty iron was stronger than the lure of mischief, thus permitting an ungrateful, dissolute mahout to spend the price of a new steel ring on arrack, which is worse than white mule whisky, and more prolific of misjudgment.

AND NOW Quorn and Asoka were one inseparable entity long as Quorn could keep his knees under those upraised ears. He had never before ridden on an elephant. The only cataclysmic motion he had ever felt was on a steamer on the way to India, and there had been something then to cling to, as well as fellow passengers to lend him confidence. He was alone now—as alone as an unwilling thunderbolt, aware of force that was expelling him from spheres that he vaguely knew into an incomprehensible, unknown but immediate future where explosion lay in wait.

Asoka screamed contempt of consequences, and the dust was vibrant with nerve shattering alarm. Quorn's helmet was down over his eye; he did not dare to lift a hand to push it back in place. He was drenched in sweat. He felt the low branches of trees brush past him and was aware of dim danger colored green that went by far too swiftly to be recognized. The speed was beyond measurement, being relative to Quorn's imagination and to nothing else except Asoka's wrath; they four were one—two organisms and two states of consciousness, with one goal, swiftly to be reached but unpredictable.

They passed through the compound gate like gray disaster being born, with

several sarcastic godlets on the gateposts grinning it good riddance.

And because the road was straight toward the market, headlong forward went Asoka, caring nothing whither, so he got there and then somewhere else. Carts went crashing right and left. A swath of boots and tents were laid low. Fruit stalls, egg stalls, sticky colored drink stalls, booths in which candy was sold and fortune tellers' booths, peep shows, cooked vegetable curry stalls and piles of baskets lined the long street; and because an indignant elephant goes through and not around things, those went down like trash in the wake of a cyclone, each concussion a fresh insult to Asoka, who was red eyed and who undoubtedly loathed himself for having ever obeyed a human being.

Quorn ceased at last to wonder what would happen next, having exhausted all the possibilities and having made exactly one hundred per cent. of wrong guesses. He began, instead, to wonder what to do about it, which is a sign of rebirth of that state of consciousness that makes men superior to elephants. Not that he felt superior—not yet! He felt like nothing on the edge of cosmos.

"What's the big stiff thinking about?" he wondered. "Where does he kid himself he's going? What's he figuring to fix? Who-o-o-a, Irish! Who-o-o-a, Blood! Easy and let me down, you sucker—then get the hell away from here and smash all you want to! Easy, feller, easy!"

MANY cataclysms happened before Quorn realized that he was speaking the wrong language. By that time there was a black cotton umbrella threaded on Asoka's trunk like a rat preventer on a ship's cable. He was catastrophically anxious to be rid of the incomprehensible thing. So there began to be sporadic variations of the motion and Quorn had to hold on tighter than ever. There began to be concentration now, a deliberate determination to destroy. And they reached the market. Quorn's helmet was struck by a roof beam as they passed in through the cluttered entrance between heaps of baskets; it collapsed around his neck, enabling other people to see him rather better, and disarranging his hair so that he looked even more than usually like the figure on the end wall.

Rumor in the East is borne on bats' wings; but Asoka had arrived more swiftly than the rumor of his coming. Doubtless he was a monstrous apparition darkening the entrance. There is a pause before a panic, as there is before a typhoon. Even Asoka paused. Men had a moment's opportunity to stare at red eyed anger and the rider who, suddenly self-conscious, dreading to look ridiculous before all that throng, straightened himself and sat majestically, with a sahib's unapproachable aloofness, as if he were there on purpose, obeyed by the monster he rode. Then wrath burst loose again, and Quorn's ears caught no single note in the confusion, his eyes discerned no individual. He heard only the tumult, saw only the kaleidoscopic movement. He was busy holding on.

There is no wrath like an elephant's. It is a prehistoric passion. It is elemental, learned in the dawn of time when Nature was brewing a world in a cauldron of floods and earthquakes, burning trash with white hot lava and obliterating errors with sulphur and boiling deluges. Whatever is made, must be unmade, swiftly, utterly unmade. The taught, trick loaded memory of one short life is in abeyance. Herd memory survives, and with it horror of all things new. There is almost nothing that is not new to such primeval consciousness—new, abominable, loathsome, to be trodden flat.

Down went the market stalls—cloth, eggs, brassware, chickens, crockery, imported clocks, curry and spices, cooked food, benches, baggage, basketry—smashed into a smear of vanity that once was. Humans in white eyed droves flowed this and that way, witless, aimless, shrilling, praying to a thousand gods—as if the gods cared!

There was dreadful din under the roof,

like the braying and cracking of battle, until the rajah's soldiers came. They were a gentle soldiery, fierce only of wax and whisker, careful above all things not to harm Asoka, who was expensive, or the crowd that was a lot too cheap, but friendly in its way. They made a vast and most important noise. They brought three bugles into action. They caused the roof, between anvil chorus volleys, to reverberate with hoarse voiced orders. Being well drilled, they avoided danger, setting good example, so that there was plenty of room for Asoka, havoc fully finished, to come avalanching forth and down the steps again into the sunlight, trumpeting for more destruction.

SOME said afterwards that Quorn shouted as he passed outward through the gate, but others doubted that, though all agreed that he moved his right arm, as if his right hand held an *ankus*, and that his gesture, position, attitude were those—exactly—of the figure who rode the elephant amid the broken carving of the old end wall. It was agreed by every one, including numbers who did not see and who therefore knew much more about it, that all he lacked, to make resemblance perfect, was a turban. For his coat was gone; it strangled him; he had thrown it away; he sat in flapping, loose, bazar made shirt-sleeves, and his hair, perhaps erect with fright, was not so unlike a turban that men, who believe in such nonsense as destiny, should not glance at the end wall and make suggestions to themselves.

It costs nothing to make suggestions. There is no law against adding two and two together. Men need a modicum of kind, imaginative comfort when they see their stalls and goods and money smashed into a shapeless, many smelling chaos.

And now speed again in straight spurts. Nineteen dogs, until that moment satisfied to lick sores and scratch verminous pelts, suddenly and simultaneously let themselves be swept into the current of excitement; and having had a nice, long, lazy morning they were as, so to speak, fresh as a pariah dog may be said to be.

They joined in with enthusiasm, an offensive, vulgar, uninvited, unclean pack of yellow curs, each in a little dust cloud of his own, ears up, tail between legs and anatomy tautened in spasmodic curves of speed. Nineteen dogs were enough to make a whole herd of elephants hysterical. Asoka left the city with his trunk outstretched in front of him and his tail outstretched behind—calamity in gray, expelled by Providence, as some folk said, though there were others who do not believe in Providence, unless you spell it with a small "p".

It was the sort of day that would have tamed a locomotive, so hot it was, so merciless the sun. The very palms and mangoes seemed to cast a shriveled shadow. Sound itself fainted with weariness. All masonry became a mirror in which only heat was visible, and when eyes refused to tolerate it, then a mirror from which heat was felt. Sweat dried still born. Oven haze enwrapped all nature and the aching earth smothered even the noise of five ton footsteps, so that Asoka became a great gray ghost bestridden by a wraith, dry throated, talking to himself, with jumbled memories like dreams upshaken into slowly developing consciousness.

"Crashing the gates o' death, I'd call it! He ain't thinking. He ain't looking. He's going, and he don't give a damn where, till he hits what stops him. Gee, there ain't no brakes on this here vehicle! No license plate—no nothing—not even a cop in sight! Who'd ever have thought I'd crave to see a cop! Gee! Guess it was all my doing, climbing on him. Wish I was in Philadelphia!"

But it was no use wishing.

AND NOW Bamjee—babu with a keen eye for the main chance, former telegraphist promoted to purchasing agent on commission for his Highness the rajah and, naturally as well as consequently, eager to encourage business . . . Should an elephant die or

grow feeble, Bamjee bought a new one. Did nature forces, behind *purdah* curtains, inspire ladies of high rank to think of jewelry, Bamjee notified the jewelers.

It was even rumored that he split commissions with the court astrologer, who indicated to the ladies which were the proper dates on which to buy such merchandise; but you can trust some people to talk unkindly about everything. Agents for automobiles, gramophones, radio outfits, cameras, clothing, furniture—all had to interview Bamjee. And the rajah paid, when he felt disposed, which was usually after Bamjee had been promised a little extra something for accelerating payment. A very energetic, generous and not intolerent babu, possessed of a college A. B. degree and an enormous fund of cultured incredulity. A little lean man with a big head, gold rimmed spectacles, ingratiating manner and a chocolate and cream hue of skin, accentuated by a rose pink turban.

Bamjee sat in the garden of such a villa as only rajah's dream of, scratching a square inch of the skin behind his ear, a symptom of perplexity. He sat cross legged at the feet of loveliness incarnate in the form of the Princess Sankyamuni, on whose face there scintillated such emotions as mischief, rebellion, indignation, merriment and daring, all mixed up together—an enticing and exhilarating mixture, likely enough to inspire the heart and bewilder the brain of any one beholding it, as for instance Bamjee did.

It was a lovely garden well supplied by Bamjee with expensive luxuries all purchased on commission. Haroun al Raschid—Shah Jehan—none of the traditional lords of opulence and ease enjoyed such comforts as that villa and its garden held behind the time stained limestone wall.

There were electric fans, unseen, in every hiding place where they could possibly be used to waft cool breezes on reclining lovers. There were fountains, summerhouses, pools in which the lotus bloomed and birds bathed, irrigated trees that shimmered like jade in sunlight, flowers like matched jewels on the breast of mother earth and, in fact, everything that could possibly help to prove how all earth loves a lover, even though the lover love not the proprieties for any one's advice.

One commentator on the laws of Manu makes the possibly irrelevant remark that love is not what lovers sometimes think it is. Perhaps the commentator knew. Bamjee did not; he loved money and intrigue and a certain sort of secret influence that steered adroitly between the reefs of responsibility and the shoals of too much work. A very human person, Bamjee, scratching his head with a perplexed but persistent finger. He was not thinking about elephants.

It might indeed be difficult to think of anything with the Princess Sankyamuni looking at you with eyes such as the East adores with poetry. They were half hidden beneath langorous dark lids that did not even try to conceal excitement. She had pearly skin with just a hint of color, and the great dark pearls that she wore as earrings beneath a turban of cloth of gold were like drops of the juice of royalty exuding from her.

Her dress was the color of dawn on a mountain skyline. She wore her *sari* with the grace engraved by ancient sculptors on the stone of certain temple walls, and there were jewels on her feet and ankles. She was a blossom blooming on the last twig of an ancient royal vine, whose vital force and genius had all flowed into her in one last burst of life before the vine should die, to fertilize a new democracy—perhaps.

"Oh, daughter of the moon," said Bamjee, "this is wonderful, but it is also terrible. Suppose these garden walls had ears!"

"They have," she answered, "but they are dumb to any one except the gods; so talk on, and take care to say only what the gods will enjoy when they ask of the walls what happened."

"Heaven born sahiba, may this babu talk of commonplaces? It is so easy to talk about gods and so difficult to keep

the mind on matters of fact in your Highness' royal presence. If the question may be forgiven, does it not occur to your superb imagination that this situation is desperate, that this babu will be accused of aiding and abetting your escape, that I shall not only lose my perquisites and emoluments, but also shall undoubtedly be made to eat slow poison—ground glass, probably."

"Yes, any fool would know that. Use your wits, then, Bamjee."

"BUT I have no wits. Daughter of the dawn star, they are all gone! It is awful! The emissaries of his Highness, the Maharajah of Jamnuggar—think of it—will learn that she on whom his eighteen-gun-saluted majesty has set his heart has fled from her parental roof. Consider it! They will insult your royal parent. And when Jamnuggar learns of it he also will insult your parent in an expert manner and will tell tales that will make your family name a byword and a laughing stock in every bazar in India! Who could forgive that? Who could possibly forgive it? It is not that your royal parent minds your modern views. I think he secretly enjoys them. But he has to think about the Hindu priests, who have so much influence and who are so conservative, and who object to royal ladies showing their beautiful faces in public.

"He thinks about his own shame, which is to say he thinks about public opinion, about which you do not propose to concern yourself, because you imagine you can run away from it. But how to get away from here? There is no way. To remain here is to be discovered, and discovery means, O Krishna, what does it not mean? Think of the shame of your royal father when the dreadful news is out and all the city talks about it!"

"He is like one of those parents whom one reads about in novels, Bamjee. He has some superficial virtues, but he knows nothing about shame. He can't possibly understand, for instance, what my shame would be if I should be married to a man I never saw and whom I would therefore refuse to love, even if he were so lovable that it killed me not to love him."

"O Krishna, in addition they will blame me for buying books for you! What will his Highness, your awful royal father do? What *can* he do, except to incarcerate you? Or possibly he may give you to the priests, to be a temple ministrant."

"Oh no, Bamjee. The priests would refuse to have me. You see, I know too much."

"But, daughter of the moon, we get no comfort out of all this talk! What shall we do? You say you will go to America? Do you know where America is? And do you know about the quota, how they count heads and refuse all immigrants who are not certified as suitable? And are you suitable? And who shall certify you? And how shall you get to Bombay, which is the port from which steamers start? You have neither clothes nor money for such a journey."

"That is for you to attend to, Bamjee. I have made up my mind to be independent and I have run away. I have done my part."

"Krishna! Who shall explain things to a woman?"

"There is no need for explanations. Unless some way is found out of this difficulty, you will be ruined, Bamjee, and that is all about it."

"Daughter of the dawn, if they should find us here—O Krishna! Yet if I should take you to some other place, if we should pass out through the gate, the servants—daughter of mystery, how did you get here?"

"There, over the wall where it is broken. See where I tore my dress? I came while it was yet dark. You kept me waiting an unconscionable time, for which you should be ashamed instead of daring to suggest I did wrong. I did right, Bamjee. I believe in destiny. The astrologer said that I shall marry whom I will, because undoubtedly there is independence in my destiny."

The babu burst into English, by way of mannerly concession to the sex of his

tormentor. Swear he must, but not in her language, in her presence, even in that crisis.

"Oh, damn destiny! If there is any such thing as destiny—"

HE WAS interrupted by the sound of enormous breathing, like a giant's, and titanic footsteps, muffled, as if gods were coming. Bamjee, the cultured unbeliever, sank his neck into his shoulders and turned up his toes, every nerve alert, anticipating evil. But the princess, primed with modern novels and absurd ideas of freedom, could hardly be expected to be wise or properly religious. She was an optimist.

"Something wonderful is going to happen!" she exclaimed, and clapped her hands.

"Yes, any fool could guess that," remarked Bamjee. "My flesh creeps. Robbers undoubtedly are coming to murder me and carry you away. There is nowhere to escape to. Destiny, thou art a devil!"

He was acting bravely for the honor of his sex. There was a moment of ghastly silence, timed into pulse beats by swift, oncoming, muffled footfalls to which the babu's heart beat *obligato*, and by a breathing that suggested horrors reaching forth for some one weak and innocent to horrify. Then suddenly the babu screamed. The horror happened.

There was a shock like an earthquake. The old rotten limestone wall, already broken, shook, lurched, tottered, and fell inward, battered headlong by an elephant blind with exhaustion. Then more of the wall went down, like a dam destroyed by spring floods, opening to left and right and tumbling into dusty heaps. For a second in the gap, enormous and partly stunned, Asoka loomed, an apparition ridden by a phantom. Then the great brute staggered forward, stumbled on the masonry and fell. He lay heaving, sobbing, groaning near enough to the fishpond to smell water and too spent to reach it, an enormous lump of abject misery. Quorn was pitched in an equally woeful heap at the feet of Bamjee, whose turban fell off as he backed away and fell into the pond among the frightened frogs.

The princess was the only one unterrified. She kept her head and lost, in fact, nothing except her imported lipstick, which she was just about to use because she wanted to look lovely in the presence of destiny's messenger; a sudden nervous gesture sent it spinning close to Quorn's hand, and Quorn, not knowing what he did, clutched it, so that three of his fingers became smeared with carmine.

Destiny, though wearing no top hat, as specialists ought, had done to Quorn what specialists do to nitwits in the bughouse. It had jarred loose something that he had not known was there and he was, consequently, coldly sane in some respects. He staggered to his feet and, with his left hand, tore away the remains of his helmet that was crushed around his neck. He refused to believe his eyes yet. There was too much loveliness to look at. He had read of such damsels in story books, but he had never believed they existed.

What with the emotions he had come through, and the shock of falling, he was almost ready to believe himself dead and in another world. This exquisite creature before him, whose eyes were dewey jewels, might almost be an angel, such as his mother had described when he was head high to her apronstring.

Nevertheless, he was sane enough to notice that her dress was torn and that she looked excited, which no angel should be. Also he noticed that he did not feel afraid of her, and he had always entertained a dread of meeting angels. So there was something wrong about that somewhere.

QUORN fell back on habit. With his right hand, that had crushed the carmine lipstick, he began scratching his head, just over the pineal gland that is such a problem to the scientists, and three red marks appeared, exactly like a caste mark, in exactly the place where a caste mark ought to be.

With the same hand he felt for the top of his head, half hiding his face from the princess. He discovered, as he suspected, that his skull was almost baked through by the sun. Then his roving goat's eye saw the babu's turban. He picked it up, put it on and turned again toward the princess, who saw for the first time turban, yellow eyes and caste mark.

She screamed, whereat old habit and familiar memories mingled in Quorn's half stunned brain. He began to think instinctively in terms of Philadelphia, but he spoke intuitively in the language of Narada, taking great pains with his grammar and pronounciation. So the speech was polished, but the thought was this wise:

"You've no call to fear me, missy. Me and him are committing trespass, but we didn't mean no harm by it."

He turned from her to look at "him"—Asoka, sobbing and tossing his trunk in futile efforts to reach water, which was several feet too far away. Quorn suddenly became aware of Bamjee crawling out of the fishpond, with his mouth half full of lotus stalks.

"Hey, you!" he ordered. "*Panee lao!* Fetch a bucket quick to give this poor sucker a drink. He's famished."

Bamjee ignored the order; he was too indignant. But Quorn spied a gardener's watering can, imported and expensive, left among the flowers by a home grown gardener who preferred the old fashioned goatskin water bag. He seized the can, filled it, grabbed Asoka's trunk and thrust it into the receptacle.

"There, ye darned old idjit, help yourself."

The water vanished, to be squirted down the great brute's dusty throat, while Quorn refilled the can. A second and a third two gallon dose went sluicing down the gurgling throat. Then Quorn took a drink himself and perhaps the relief it gave him stirred imagination. He sat down on Asoka's forefoot and began to comfort the great brute.

"There, don't you carry on. 'Tweren't your fault. It was all my doing, climbing on your neck, and you not used to a guy like me. There, there, quit grieving. There ain't no special harm been done, nothing but what money'll set right, and there's always somebody got money, even if it ain't you and me. You're bruised a bit, but all of us gets bruises now and then. You've earned yours. You've had your fun, so cheer up. You sure did play the typhoon in that marketplace!"

Asoka seemed aware that comfort was intended, for he left off moaning. He even touched Quorn's shoulder with his trunk. But his eyes did not lose their madness until Quorn began talking in the native tongue, the way mahouts do when their charges are in trouble.

"A prince, a rajah of the hills, a bull of bulls, a royal bull! Did they offend him? Did they offend my pearl of elephants? He shall have great honor paid him. He shall have a howdah of gold and emeralds. They shall paint him blue and scarlet. He shall lead the line of elephants and he shall carry none but kings!"

The poor bewildered brute responded, swaying his head to and fro and permitting Quorn to rub the edges of his ears. Whatever reasoning went on within Aaoka's brain, he evidently did not connect Quorn with the cause of his anguish, but rather with relief from it. Quorn was his friend in need, who had dropped, as it were, from the sky to bring him water in extremity. He gurgled for more water. Quorn persuaded him to rise and led him to the fishpond.

BAMJEE made the next remark, quite suddenly. His modern views were weakening. He needed moral and material support.

"Destiny be damned!" he exclaimed in downright English. "That man is a cab-driver from the United States," he added.

His modern views were weakening; he needed moral and material support.

"You lie," said the princess calmly. "He is Gunga. He is sent by destiny to make me free!" Her eyes were glowing orbs of triumph.

Quorn, busy with the elephant, knew

nothing, and cared less concerning ancient legends. He was standing in front of Asoka, beneath the upraised trunk, coaxing with whatever argument occurred to him:

"Now don't you act crazy again, you big boob. You've only got one friend on earth this minute, and that's me, you sucker. Lose me and you lose your last chance. They'll shoot you sure, unless I take the blame for all the damage you've done. Don't kid yourself. Many a time I've known what it is not to have a friend in the world; I tell you it's no cinch. You big stiff, thank your lucky stars, instead of looking at me red eyed like a dog-gone nightmare."

"Bamjeet!" exclaimed the Princess. "Do I, or do I not, look like 'her'? Does he, or does he not, resemble 'him'?"

"You do. He does," Bamjee admitted ruefully, as one who hated to concede to himself that he was secretly glad of the incredible, plain fact.

Suddenly the princess seized entire command of Bamjee and the situation.

"Come!" she commanded. "I don't care now who sees us. The more the better. Help me to find some sort of saddle for the elephant. Help me to find servants."

"But this man and his elephant may go away," Bamjee objected.

"No, they will not," she retorted. "This is destiny. There is nothing for us to do but bring a saddle and some servants."

"That is most unmitigated nonsense," remarked Bamjee under his breath. "This is lunacy, but why not be a lunatic if lunatics are happy? To put a saddle on destiny is something altogether new, I think."

Quorn was devoting his entire attention to the elephant. That shock of crashing through the wall had had a strange effect on both of them. It had made Asoka crazy. It had made Quorn sane. It had shaken loose Asoka's memories of tricks learned in his youth a half century before; memory had become mixed up with desire to please his only friend, so he began to dance a sort of double shuffle, bobbing his aching head in time to unheard drum beats and shaking his feet as if bells were fastened to them.

Quorn, with his new found sanity, perceived that if he would control the elephant he must encourage him to do the things he wanted to. So he encouraged him to dance.

"That's the way to shake 'em. So's the boy! Step lively, you old sucker."

He began to whistle, and the whistling suggested something else to Asoka, who stopped dancing and raised himself on his hind legs. Quorn encouraged that too.

"Now try the other end, old-timer."

Not knowing the proper word of command, he made signals, which Asoka evidently understood, for he came to the ground and then stood on both forefeet with his hind legs in the air.

Presently Quorn had him waltzing around the fishpond, causing devastation of the garden but establishing a cordial understanding, which was increased when Quorn espied a long handled scrubbing broom that some gardener had left amid the shrubbery. He ordered the elephant into the pond and was obeyed so swiftly that more than a dozen fish were splashed out on the wave displaced by five descending tons. Quorn picked up the struggling fish by the tails and threw them in again. The elephant lay on the muddy bottom, reveling amid the ruin of lotus plants. Quorn seized the broom, and, stepping on him, scrubbed him thoroughly, as he had seen mahouts do. When one side was finished, Asoka rolled over and Quorn scrubbed the other side.

A BATH and scrubdown to a weary elephant are as toast to a poached egg; they belong together, and it is the fitness of things that creates harmonious conditions, out of which events are born. Forth from the pond came a new Asoka, contrite and amendable, who needed only a little something more to make him feel that the world was, after all, the best place ever invented.

Quorn went off in search of sugar cane, because his intuition was now working full blast. Asoka followed him, determined not to lose so soon this prodigy of friendship, so Quorn held him by the trunk and they explored together, neither of them meaning to do damage and yet not estimating heights and widths with accuracy that was any credit to them. They passed under an ornamental wooden archway, six inches too small in each direction for Asoka's bulk. It naturally came adrift and would have started another reign of terror, but for Quorn's presence of mind; he contrived to pretend that the destruction of that arch was exactly what he wanted, and that utmost speed away from there was the next event in order.

They arrived in haste, but not in panic, around the corner of a building, into a stable yard where ancient vehicles and rotting lumber were crowded in confusion against the far wall. Along one side there was a shed, in which Quorn spied sugar cane. He made the elephant lie down in mid-yard, appropriated half a dozen stalks of the tempting stuff and proceeded to baby his charge.

"There now. That's for being daddy's good boy, daddy's pearl. That's what good boys get for doing what daddy tells them." Never having been a daddy, never having even felt like one before, he let the new emotion have its head. "You damned old duffer, you and me's friends, d'you get me? I never knew how bad I needed a friend."

Then more astonishment. Quorn found himself surrounded by the princess, Bamjee and a score of native servants who had dragged forth from a shed an ancient elephant saddle with its small crimson canopy still intact. They proceeded to try to put the saddle on Asoka, who objected. Quorn tried to prevent them, but the princess became furious and he could not manage both her and Asoka, so he chose the simpler task and controlled the elephant, who jumped to the conclusion that Quorn wished him to be saddled.

Anything that Quorn wished was Asoka's pleasure, so presently, after much sweating and shouting the saddle was in position. The princess climbed in. She commanded Quorn to take his place as mahout in front of her. Bamjee, bringing an ancient *ankus* from a shed, placed it in Quorn's hand and Quorn climbed on to Asoka's neck in a sort of daydream. He did not know where to go or what next was expected of him, but Bamjee gave the necessary order and the elephant rose, immediately turning homeward.

Home was what Asoka craved now. That futile picket under the outspreading *neem* tree was as necessary to him as a warm bed and a good book and a towel are to us prodigal sons. He must reestablish his existence on a normal basis. Most of us crave normalcy, and elephants are just like anybody else. So it was best foot foremost, with Bamjee riding ahead on a moth eaten, melancholy looking pony; because Bamjee was a babu with an eye to opportunity, who thought of destiny as the product of keen men's scheming. Bamjee had it all by heart now. He could see the outcome.

And it was even better than Bamjee hoped for. All the inhabitants of Narada City who had nothing else to do at the moment—that is to say almost all of them—had turned out and were pouring along the highway to discover what had happened to the elephant and Quorn. They were excited, hot, breathless, expecting something terrible, and in a mood to be thoroughly entertained by anything, so be it staggered imagination. The sun shone through the cloud of dust they raised, on to a drunken splurge of color all in motion. And they beheld a miracle; no doubt about that whatever.

THEY beheld an elephant that moved as if impelled by an obsessing purpose, holding his trunk rigid as he swiftly shuffled through the dust. They beheld an ancient scarlet howdah on his back, a howdah such as nobody had seen for generations. Riding in the howdah was a gloriously dressed

and radiantly beautiful young woman, whom not one of them had ever seen before, because the law of *purdah* had always kept her in strict seclusion.

When Asoka had burst forth in his fury from the city, he had had no howdah on his back. When Quorn had ridden forth, he had had no turban on his head. There had been no princess connected in any way whatever with the incident. So what should anybody think? Quorn sat bolt upright, so exactly like the image on the wall that nobody with any sense at all could doubt him. There was a carmine caste mark on his forehead. And the princess, radiantly lovely, unveiled, looking straight before her, was so thrilling that anybody who had imagination—and who has not?—would be eager to believe the utterly incredible about her, and the more incredible, the better.

Furthermore, they heard the voice of Bamjee crying:

"Way there! Way for the Wheel of Destiny! Behold! The gods now finish what the gods began!"

Could anything be simpler? Could anything be more authentic? Why should anybody not believe it? A roar went up, such a roar as Alexander heard, or Darius, when a multitude acclaimed him king of kings. The crowd began to dance with enthusiasm. They began to shout time honored phrases of mystical meaning. Messengers were sent on borrowed ponies to inform the priests of thirty temples that an ancient prophesy was coming true.

And because there is competition among temples, as in any other walk of life, and no set of priests was willing to let any other set have all the credit—rightly, too, since none of them had earned it—all the priests turned out in full array with drums and bands of sacred music, leading the procession; so that Asoka had to slow down lest he tread on priestly heels. And that provided time for garlands to be woven, garlands that were tossed to Quorn and that fell and draped Asoka's shoulders and the scarlet howdah, until Asoka and his burden were a mass of flowers and the street was strewn with trodden blossoms.

Through Harada's quiet streets there surged such a throng as those ancient buildings had not seen for centuries. The sacred peacocks screamed from garden walls. The sacred monkeys jabbered and brimaced from jade green trees. The parokeets wove bright green patterns in the sunlight. And the sun, in his place, as usual, but having no concern at all with destiny, beamed down his benison on all concerned.

PRESENTLY they reached the palace gate, because the princess so commanded, and Asoka willingly obeyed the pressure of Quorn's knee. Bamjee had ridden ahead for private conversation with the rajah, Bamjee being a man who had an eye for opportunity as well as a lucrative job to lose. So the rajah, who had had several whiskies to console him for the morning's accident, had time to get into his royal robes and a strategic state of mind.

He realized he had an opportunity to snub the eighteen gun Jamnuggar, which was better fun than being allied to him, and that he could bully the priests, which was better fun than being patronized. Bejewelled then, and pleasantly inspired by potent spirit, he received the thunderous procession at the splendid entrance gate, surrounded by scores of attendants in their best court suits.

The crowd heard nothing, because the crowd itself was making too much noise. But the crowd saw, which was all important, because liberty—whatever the philosophers may have to say of it—is something that the crowd gives or the crowd withholds. Priests, acolytes and temple ministrants were forced to make way, striving to preserve their dignity; Asoka had a one track mind.

Home was what Asoka wanted, but he was aware that Quorn wished him to deliver his burden first, so he hurried to get that over with and made for the gateway through the swarm of priests, as an alibi

goes through circumstantial evidence, brushing it all aside, a five-ton alibi, as welcome to the rajah as a catchword to a politician. And Bamjee managed to get the gates shut just behind him, while the crowd yelled itself hoarse.

"She is free! She is free! She has her liberty! The gods sent Gunga back to finish his task! *Bande Sankyamuni!*"

Only a dozen priests had entered behind Asoka before the gates were closed. They grouped themselves around the rajah to prevent him from appearing too important, and Quorn made Asoka kneel before them all. They happened to be priests from different temples, so that they were not unanimous except in determination to snatch all the credit possible; and the rajah was quite a statesman when he had such a man as Bamjee to make suggestions in a whisper from behind.

"You, who are custodians of truth and the interpreters of events," he said, "is this or is it not fulfilment of an ancient prophecy?"

They said undoubtedly it was fulfilment. There was nothing else they could say with the crowd outside the gate all yelling the correct interpretation in their ears. They could hardly deny the full significance of what had happened after permitting themselves to lend their dignity to the procession.

"Then you will inform the Maharajah of Jamuggar's ministers that destiny has raised my daughter higher than even he may reach?"

They liked that. They agreed at once. It would raise Narada to a hitherto unhoped for eminence, and themselves to the position of censors of royal marriages. It gave them the chance to seize importance for themselves. They said no other course was possible.

"Then you will tell the people," said the rajah, "that my daughter has been set free from the laws of *purdah*, but without loss of caste or priestly recognition."

That was a challenge, which they had to answer on the spot, and they could only answer one way, being jealous of one another and afraid that if one said no, another might say yes. So they agreed.

"Then let there be a celebration," said the rajah, Bamjee prompting him. "Let all the city celebrate with fireworks and colored lanterns. There shall be a banquet in the streets tonight at my cost. And my daughter shall ride through the streets by torchlight, with twenty elephants and all my army, to celebrate her emancipation."

THERE was nothing for those priests to do but to accept the situation and to study how to swim with the new tide, not against it. They departed solemnly, with dignity, to order garlands hung upon the carving on the end wall of the market place, while Bamjee slipped away to purchase fireworks on commission. Bamjee was happy. But some people are never satisfied; the rajah, being royal, craved the rind as well as the fruit, so to his daughter he was royally surly when the priests were out of earshot and they stood like actors in the wings, without an audience.

"Do you see what you have done?" he snorted. "You have made it utterly impossible for me to govern! You have used one silly story to upset a thousand customs. You will upset me next. Then what?"

"Ask the astrologer!" she answered laughing. "Destiny does strange things! May it make you generous to Gunga!"

And, since her giggling maids had come, she let herself be shrouded in a silken shawl and borne away into the palace to have supper and be bathed and arrayed and hung with jewels to make ready for the evening celebration.

"This rising generation," the rajah remarked savagely, "has neither grace nor gratitude."

But having said that, he began to feel better, so he lighted a large cigar and came quite close to Quorn, who was sitting silent on Asoka's neck. He narrowly examined Quorn's eyes, nodding.

"You're a strange coincidence," he

commented. "Do you believe in destiny?"

Quorn sniffed at the good cigar smoke as he met the rajah's royal gaze. There was something, somewhere that they held in common, although he could not guess what at the moment.

"Destiny be sugared," he answered. "I must take this critter home and go and mind the mission."

"Destiny is sugared sometimes," said the rajah. "I suspect this whole thing was arranged by Bamjee for the sake of business, which will make it sweet for him. Would you like a cigar?"

QUORN smoked and they observed each other, until the rajah spoke again.

"I suppose you realize that I must send you back to Philadelphia? You'll be a nuisance in Narada. They say I'm generous. You'll go, of course?"

"Me?" Quorn stared at him rebelliously. "Hell, no!"

"How much?" asked the rajah.

But nobody could buy Quorn now. He had a friend, a new experience. He had to cultivate Asoka. Nothing else could interest him.

"Hell, no!" he repeated.

"Some men don't know enough to take advantage of destiny," said the rajah.

"Maybe. Some men don't believe a lot of nonsense," Quorn retorted.

"Yes, but some men live by nonsense," said the rajah. "People like me, for instance. I enjoy nonsense.

"I enjoy you. But nonsense makes powerful enemies at times. Somebody may poison you, and we'll have to bury you unless I can find some way out of the difficulty. There's a bad lazy devil in charge of my elephants. I could protect you if you took his place, or you might like to be superintendent and keep an eye on him and all the others."

"Suits me," Quorn said simply. "Do I rate enough to live on? Very well, sir, if you'll tell 'em to open the gate I'll— Come on Two-Tails, you old sucker, play up the luck before it changes on us. Up you get and hit the pike for home. We're buddies, me and you! We'll go to by-by like a pair of good boys."

The SKIVVY

An Unforgetable Story of the Sea

By BILL ADAMS

WITH the exception of Dodson, and perhaps the black fellow, we were an ordinary enough crew; just such a crew as you might find in any sailing ship. But the men with whom I sailed on that particular voyage remain in my memory while scores of others are forgotten long ago. It was Dodson who fixed the memory of that voyage. Dodson and the black fellow. And yet not they alone. I helped to fix it myself.

I don't know, never did know, how Dodson came to be in the ship. The rest of us, except the Fiji man, were from old Brown's sailors' boarding house. He'd done the usual thing by us, of course: supplied us with 'baccy and booze, fed us, given us a dirty cot apiece, till all were a few dollars in his debt; then he shipped us off to sea, taking a month's advance wages from each of us because we were all too soggy with his vile liquor to know or care what he was up to. I suppose that he must have been one man short of a crew for the ship, and so went street prowling till he happened on Dodson and somehow managed to shanghai him, knocking him over the head from behind, as like as not. A sailors' boarding master would do almost anything in those days.

I don't remember noticing Dodson till we were on the forecastle head to heave

in the anchor. It was the mate who called my attention to him then.

"You lubberly curiosity," the mate bawled, "put your weight on that windlass bar!"

I see him still, plainly as if it were but yesterday. Tall narrow frame, black hair, pale face, patient brown eyes. Puzzled eyes, they were, but not at all frightened.

As Dickie, who was heaving on the bar next behind Dodson and the Fiji man, winked at me the mate strode up and shook his fist at Dodson.

"Heave, you!" he bawled again.

Without so much as a blink of his brown eyes Dodson leaned his unpracticed, ineffectual weight upon the bar.

Jensen the Norwegian laughed. Donley the little skinny Liverpool Irishman laughed. The two dago sailors who, because their names were unpronounceable, were called Pete and Jimmie, laughed. Elliot the old gray Englishman, and Shewan the New Englander, and Dickie and I laughed. The wind was blowing the drink out of us and, being bound for the sea and done with the robbers of the shore, we were merry. Laughing the loudest of us all, the huge Fiji man waggled his bushy black beard and shook the shiny copper ring in his nose.

The mate smiled to hear us.

"Heave, boys! Heave her in!" said he. So we heaved with a will and the anchor came up in a hurry, Dickie singing—

> "That fair young girl
> With her hair in a curl—
> That works on a sewing machine."

DODSON tagged unnoticed at our heels while we were setting sail. But once she was outside the harbor heads and had begun to roll a little we noticed him again. It was the giant Fiji man who started it. Dodson got into the black fellow's way and the great black gave him a shove that sent him sprawling.

"Haw-haw-haw! Haw-haw-haw!" we bellowed.

Dickie tripped Dodson as he was getting up, and down he went again.

"Those fellows'll make a man out of that greenhorn," I heard the mate say to the second mate. "They're a tough lot."

Saying never a word, Dodson made no protest. Not a wince out of him.

When old Elliot fetched breakfast from the cook's galley Donley snatched the mess kid from him and started to help himself.

"Ye're takin' more'n your share," said Shewan.

"What's that to you so long's ye get enough?" grinned Donley.

By the time that all but Dodson and the black were served there wasn't above a share and a half left in the kid. The Fiji man grabbed it from Jimmie, set it on his knee, and started to wolf what was left in it. Dodson sat watching. No expression in his face. Just watching.

We'd no more than finished breakfast when the mate was at the door ordering us out to get more sail on her. She was rolling about and kicking up a smother. As Dodson followed us to the deck she shipped a sea that knocked him over and washed him into the scuppers.

"Quit your infernal noise;" shouted the mate to the Fiji man, who was roaring with laughter; and to Dodson he bawled, "Get hold of that rope, you!"

But Dodson clung, seasick and helpless, to the rigging.

"The lubber'll get washed over the side," growled the mate, and ordered him off the deck.

When we went below for dinner he was asleep in his bunk. We let him sleep, and ate his share of the hash. The Fiji man was just gone to the wheel when Dodson came to the deck again toward evening. Till supper time he tagged at our heels. He was shaking with weakness when we went below to supper. He hadn't eaten since the day before.

"Dass fer you, faller," said Pete, the last to help himself, and shoved the mess kid to him, with maybe a share and a half in it. We winked at one another as, forgetting all about the Fiji man, he devoured it to the last mouthful.

"Now den I miss der fun," grumbled

Jensen as he went to relieve the black fellow at the wheel.

It took the seven of us to choke the black off Dodson. A few seconds more with the Fiji man's hands at his throat, and he'd have been a corpse. But he didn't look the least bit scared. Except to growl at him to get out of the way, none of us had spoken to him all day. No one spoke to him now. He spoke to no one. Just looked in a perplexed way from one to another of us. The black went to the galley, where he doubtlessly scared the cook into giving him most of his own supper; for he returned with crumbs in his bushy beard.

Dickie beckoned me out to the deck.

"I'm scared o' that nigger," he said.

Shewan came out and asked what was up. When we told him we were afraid to live with the black fellow he laughed.

"The nigger'll probably kill that lubber," said he. "Then they'll have to lock him up."

"Me, I'm scare of the neeger too," said Pete, who'd followed Shewan.

"What's going on here?" asked the mate, appearing from the mainsail's shadow.

"We're afraid o' the nigger, sir," said Dickie.

"Jump him," sneered the mate, "jump him, the lot of you. Give him a drubbing and put him in his place. Scared of a nigger, eh?" he added. "I thought you were a tough lot."

WHEN we reentered the forecastle the black was sitting in a corner. Rolling his eyes as he sharpened his sheathknife, he was staring at Dodson, staring with that satisfied look that you'll see on the face of a butcher who enjoys butchering. No hate in the look, no pity. Just satisfaction.

Night set in dark and squally. We were called out from time to time to trim the yards and take in sail. Each time we returned to the forecastle we looked to see whether Dodson was still there. All night long he came and went with the rest of us. The Fiji man seemed to have forgotten him. All night long whenever any of us got in his way the black thrust out one of his enormous paws and shoved us over, laughing as he did so. While working among the sails aloft we were one and all careful to keep away from him, lest in pushing us out of his way he knock us to the sea far below. Dodson didn't go aloft that night. The mate ordered him to stay on the deck.

"I veesh he keel dat lubber," said Pete. "Den de mate locks him up."

"Wot did a man like you ever come to sea for?" Old Elliot asked Dodson. "You ain't no good to us."

Dodson made no answer.

When Shewan brought breakfast from the galley the Fiji man snatched the kid from him and, grinning round at us, helped himself to a three man share. No one dared protest. We divided what was left into equal parts, left a smaller one for Dodson, and went back to the deck hungry.

Having sent the Fiji man aloft to work in the rigging, the mate looked round at the rest of us. We knew what was in his mind. The black would have to have some one to help him. Turning to Dodson, the mate asked—

"You scared of a black fellow?"

Dodson shook his head.

"The black'll push him off into the sea," muttered old Elliot. "Then they'll lock him up."

Working on the deck, we kept an eye on the two in the rigging. All morning we heard the black ordering Dodson about. Dodson might have been his slave. We began to boast of what we'd do if a black fellow tried to order us about in that fashion. But when the mate was anywhere near we were silent.

At dinner the black helped himself to a three man share again. Shewan and Elliot went aft to complain to the skipper then. The skipper laughed at them and told them to settle their own affairs.

After eating a three man share at supper, the black went to the wheel. Then Pete whetted his sheathknife.

"The dago's goin' to fix him," we said, whispering to one another.

Dodson was asleep in his bunk when Pete left the forecastle just before the Fiji man was due to be relieved at the wheel. Dickie went aft to take over the wheel. His eyes were popping. As soon as he was gone we all crept out to listen. At a yell in the darkness we all scurried back into the forecastle. The mate came running forward, shouting as he came.

"What's this? What's going on here?" demanded the mate at our door.

Before any one could speak, the Fiji man entered, with a grin on his face. One of his arms was bleeding. His other hand was clutched round Pete's neck. Pete's eyes were goggling.

"That's it, is it?" said the mate as the black dropped Pete to the deck. "Hand out your knives," he ordered.

As one by one we handed out our knives, he broke the points off them. All but the Fiji man's knife.

"You're a tough lot, all right," he sneered, and turned to the black. "Here, fellow, let's look at that arm of yours."

But the black laughed in his face.

"He's the only man in the lot of you," grunted the mate, and left the forecastle.

The Fiji man ripped the shirt off Donley's back and ordered Dodson to bind up his arm. While the rest of us went out to the deck because we were afraid to stay in the forecastle, Dodson went back to his bunk.

AT EVERY meal the Fiji man took a three man share. All day long he ordered Dodson about. No one of us ever spoke to either him or Dodson. We hated them both, and despised them both; despising the Fiji man for his black skin, and Dodson for slaving for a black fellow.

One morning when we were all on our knees holystoning the main deck, all of us hungry and full of hate, old Elliot rose to move a coil of rope out of his way. With a good wind at her heels, the ship was making maybe ten miles an hour. There was a high sea running. The Fiji man and Dodson were at work on the mainyard just above us. The black was ordering Dodson about as usual, and we were whispering of what we'd do if any black man ever tried to talk to us in that fashion. The mate was walking up and down on the poop.

Suddenly the mate shouted—

"Look out there, Elliot!"

At almost the same instant there came a yell from the mainyard just above us. Old Elliot gave a cry of horror and, jumping to our feet, we knew at once that he hadn't meant to do it.

Somehow old Elliot had slacked the brace on its pin. Taken unexpectedly by the sudden jerk of the yard, the black man had fallen to the deck.

Before the mate could get to him the black rose on one knee. With one of his arms hanging limp, he grinned up into the mate's face and rose unsteadily to his feet. As he pointed aloft to the mainyard no one noticed that he was standing on one foot. We just looked up to where he pointed.

Dodson was gone.

From the time that the mate shouted to Elliot to when we had a boat away ten minutes must have elapsed. Dickie and I and Shewan and Elliot went with the mate to look for Dodson. We knew we'd never find him, of course.

At the moment that, giving up the search, the mate turned the boat back for the ship a man at her masthead waved and pointed. So we turned the boat again and went on looking for Dodson. When we caught sight of him he must have been well over half an hour in the water. The sea was so noisy that he didn't hear the mate shouting. We rowed up on him from behind. He didn't seem to be swimming, didn't seem to be making any effort. His head bobbed up and down, and now and then was hidden by a breaking sea crest. He didn't see us till we were right upon him. He'd managed to get all his clothes off, and was stark naked.

When the mate had dragged him into the boat Dodson just sat on a thwart and looked at the sea. Didn't look the least bit afraid.

AT DINNER time that day we were exuberant. The Fiji man was in a bunk in a spare room under the forecastle head, with an arm and a leg broken. We didn't go near him, didn't care how much he was broken or whether he lived or died.

After dinner old Elliot was given the black fellow's job aloft, with Donley for helper. Dodson worked on the deck with the rest of us.

We took it out on Dodson. If he could slave for a black, he could slave for us too. We couldn't make him wait on us while we were at work on deck, of course. But we made him do so while we were below. We made him fetch all the meals, skimped his share of the grub, and made him take the empty mess kids back to the cook. We made him keep the forecastle clean. We made him grease our sea boots and oil our slickers. There wasn't anything we didn't make him do. We even made him say sir when he spoke to us. But there wasn't any making about it. He just did whatever we told him to do.

So we despised him more and more. All the devil in us came out. We white men egged the dagoes on to make his life a misery. Pete and Jimmie had him make their bunks up every day. No sailor ever bothers to make up his bunk. We just roll into the blankets and out again as the times come round. But Pete had once been bedmaker in some shore hotel, and was full of tricks. It was thanks to Pete that we had Dodson wash our tin plates after each meal. No sailor ever bothers about washing his plate. Old Elliot said Dodson made a 'blasted good skivvy'; skivvy being what an Englishman calls a servant. So we took to calling him skivvy to his face. But what we more than all despised him for now was that he'd still wait on the black fellow. He'd go whenever the Fiji man called. Even though the plug tobacco made him half sick, he'd fill and light the black man's pipe for him.

"It's a blame' good thing you wasn't drowned that time," said Shewan. "We'd 'a' had no one to wait on us."

While we all vowed that we'd never had such a good time at sea Dodson went about with a blank face. Never a murmur.

As soon as the Fiji man was able to get about a little he'd shout for Dodson, and Dodson would help him from his bunk. Leaning on Dodson, he'd limp out to the main deck, where he'd sit on the hatch with nothing on but a pair of dungaree trousers cut off at the knees. He'd watch us at our work. He'd stretch his good arm and good leg, so that the muscles would ripple under his smooth hide. He'd roll his great eyes, and talk to himself. He'd finger his sheathknife, run a thumb along the blade, touch a thumb pad to the sharp point, and grin at us. One day when we were polishing the ship's brasswork he took the copper ring from his nose, called Dodson and ordered him to polish it. That was too much for Shewan, who cried—

"*God, no!*"

The black fellow dropped to his hands and knees on the deck, and with his knife between his teeth started to crawl toward Shewan.

"Go on!" called Shewan. "Polish his ring for him."

Bellowing with laughter, the black snatched the ring from Dodson. With a sweep of his good arm he sent Dodson sprawling. His bones almost mended, he lay on his back on the hatch and grinned at the sky.

ONE NIGHT a little later the weather came in misty with an easy breeze. Fog dripped from sails and rigging.

"One of you men get that foghorn up and keep it going," ordered the mate.

I fetched the foghorn from the sailroom, carried it to the top of the forecastle, and was about to start it when I remembered Dodson.

"Send the skivvy up here, Dickie," I called.

I showed Dodson how to work the foghorn and left him to it.

The weather stayed thick all that

night. All night long, except for relieving the wheel and lookout every two hours, we stayed in our bunks, untroubled by the mates. But Dodson we left all night at the foghorn. That's the dreariest most monotonous job there is in a windjammer. A man takes a two hour trick at it, just as at wheel and lookout. But we left Dodson to it till morning.

"There's a swell job for a skivvy," we laughed.

At daybreak the fog was thicker than ever. When Jensen took the horn so that Dodson might come down and get what breakfast we'd left him, Dodson came down, shivering, his eyes heavy with sleep. The Fiji man appeared at our door while he was eating. The broken bones were mended.

As Dodson was finishing his breakfast the mate came and called all but Dodson and the black out to work. One sight of the skivvy was enough to tell the mate of the prank we'd played. While the rest of us scrubbed the bulwarks with sand and canvas all morning, Dodson and the black fellow lay in their bunks. At noon the black sent Dodson for the grub. By the time we came to dinner he had a three man share on his plate. Full of hate and contempt for the two of them, we ate our diminished shares in silence. After dinner Dodson accompanied us to the deck; but the Fiji man went back to his bunk.

"The black's all right, sir," grumbled old Elliot to the mate.

"Who in thunder asked you about anything?" the mate replied.

We hated the mate for favoring a black fellow. Knowing that if there were any heavy work to be done the black would be ordered out, we hoped for a stiff wind. And all the afternoon, while scouring paintwork, we cursed Dodson, taking it out on him because we were hungry and full of hate.

While we were at supper a puff of wind came, with heavy rain. We nudged one another then. And yet we shuddered too. We didn't fancy having the black among us in the darkness of a stormy night.

Soon the mate came forward, shouting. The black didn't wait to be ordered out. He grinned at us, stretched his great arms, stamped his great bare feet upon the planks, and leaped to the deck ahead of any one.

That night there was no rest for any one. All night long the wind kept shifting from one quarter to another. We labored in the rain all night. And all night long the black man bellowed like a bull and paid no heed to us. We knew well enough why the mate had let him lay up so long after his bones were mended—that he might be able to take his place when the need came. Need was come in good earnest.

We didn't bother the skivvy that night. There was no time to fool with him. We forgot him, save only when we found him in the way. Then he shrank from our curses. We knew how dog weary he must be. By day we were all dog weary ourselves. All but the Fiji man.

At breakfast time the Fiji man came into the forecastle, limping. He didn't grin at us that morning. He gulped a three man share and went to his bunk. He stayed there when the rest of us went back to the deck. The mate went to look at him.

"His leg's gone back on him. We'll have to get along without him," said he. To Dodson the mate said:

"Get in there and lay up! You're worse than useless on the deck in this weather!"

So Dodson went back to the forecastle and slept. But neither he nor the black was long in his bunk. An hour or two, maybe.

THE MISTS thinned suddenly. An eery yellow light lit up the sea. The skipper shouted to the mate, the mate to us. But shouting was of no use. All petrified, we just stood staring ahead; beyond the plunging bow.

Rocks right ahead! A steamer could scarce have saved herself in the distance.

Dodson came from the forecastle with the black at his heels. A huge black arm swept him aside. He was not yet upon his

feet again when she struck, with a crash that took the three topmasts out of her.

Had cutting been of any use, we couldn't have cut away the wreckage of the topmasts. We were too terrified.

The Fiji man was in the rigging first. Cursing one another, crowding and fighting, we swarmed into the rigging after him. The mates came after us, the skipper following them.

Wind beaten in the rigging, we stared at a long outlying ridge of rock with at its seaward end a sort of pinnacle. Between pinnacle and ship a boil of water. A hundred yards, perhaps.

"You useless fool!" the mate bawled down to Dodson. "Get up here!"

Rain came, a leaden gloom. The pinnacle hidden. Above us at the broken masthead clung the Fiji man. Below us, amid the high-flung spray, Dodson clung. Choked by the wind and lashed by drenching rain, we waited so.

When the rain thinned again and light returned the skipper clambered to the mate's side, close to where I clung.

"That Fiji man could swim it," I heard him shout. "Those fellows are like fish."

"His leg's gone back on him," the mate replied.

Light went again. We clung through an eternity.

"There's that lighthouse a mile up the coast," I heard the mate shout. "If it clears, they'll see us."

"It won't clear," the skipper answered.

Then, in a lower voice, lest any but the mate should hear him—

"She'll not last long like this."

I saw Dodson look up, and knew that he'd heard too. He didn't look afraid.

When Shewan who'd come on deck without his oilskins started down to try to get them from the forecastle, the mate drove him back.

"You fool!" he shouted.

The deck was water swept.

Presently I saw Dodson just below me slip lower toward the deck. "The skivvy's done," I called.

The mate looked down.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "Hold on! Get up here!"

But Dodson paid no heed. And then I saw that Dodson wasn't slipping. He was *going* down, letting himself down foot by foot.

"He'll have to go," the skipper shouted to the mate. "It's every man for himself now."

A furious squall yelled down. A sea submerged the deck. The rigging shook. Forgetting the skivvy then, each thinking of himself alone, we crowded the close.

"The skivvy's gone," I shouted as the deck cleared.

And every one glanced down. Another wave was surging toward the ship. We crowded closer, and, watching that wave's onrush, saw Dodson run stark naked from beneath the forecastle head with a coil of light line upon his shoulder. The wave submerged him as he gripped the rigging. His head rose, his shoulders, his whole naked body, as the wave passed on. Coming beside the mate, he shouted something that I could not hear. The mate put his lips to the skipper's ear and shouted. They stared at Dodson. We all stared, all incredulous, at Dodson. The mate took the light line from his shoulder and made an end fast to the rigging. The other end he fastened over the cold skivvy's shoulder, under his left arm.

Dodson was slipping toward the deck again, the mate paying out the light line as he went. Before another wave could flood the deck he was gone from the bulwark top to the water boil. Rain hid him. We watched the mate then, as he slowly paid the line away.

WHEN the rain cleared off again a shout arose, an amazed incredulous shout. Dodson's black head was a tiny dot in the water. Beating toward the pinnacle, his arm flashed steadily.

With a coil of stout rope on his shoulder, a coil he'd gathered from the topmast's wreckage, the Fiji man descended from his perch. When he came to the mate he

stopped, made one end of the rope fast in the rigging beside the end of Dodson's light line, and looked toward the pinnacle. The pinnacle was hidden in a rainburst. Dodson was hidden.

A hand on the light line, the black man waited. We waited, hoping a little now. It rained on and on. The rigging shook. The wreck beneath us gave a long slow sliding scend. When she steadied again her bow was under. Nothing but our mast was left above the water boil. We clung without hope then.

At a yell from the Fiji man we dared to look down once more. He was gently pulling in on the light line. A roar of wind blew the rain away for a moment, and in that moment we saw that the other end of the light line was fast about the pinnacle. Dodson we could not see; only the light line hanging all along the seething water.

The Fiji man flung his coil to the sea and, with its other end fast about his middle, slipped from the bulwark top. Until the rain hid him we watched him go hand over hand along the light line through the water, taking the stout rope with him. Hoping again now, we waited. Perhaps the skivvy and the black fellow would save us yet. Could they but stretch that strong rope tight, clear of the water boil, we might escape along it.

Hope died again as rain beat on and on. But by and by, at the mate's shout, it leaped again. The mate was hauling in on the stout rope. We helped him haul, and lashed it securely.

After the strong rope was taut old Elliott went first, hauling himself hand over hand along it toward the pinnacle. After him went Pete and Jimmie, then Donley, Jensen, Shewan, Dickie, and last of all I, who cursed to see those others go ahead of me. Rain lashed, wind choked, the water reached up for me as I fought my way toward the pinnacle. Till hands grasped and hauled me to the solid rock all was black terror. Tottering away, I fell and sprawled upon the recumbent body of the Fiji man, who lay outstretched half over a naked white form beneath which dark seaweeds made a soggy mattress.

I saw the two mates reach the pinnacle, and after them, last from the wreck, the skipper.

"She's gone!" the skipper cried and, pulling at the rope we'd come by, he showed us that its seaward end was loose.

Because I couldn't rise alone, Dickie and old Elliot lifted me. Jensen and Donley, Shewan and the dagoes, lifted the Fiji man. His leg was broken again, but he was grinning now. Grinning, he pointed to the white form prostrate on the seaweeds.

The two mates bent over the white form and lifted it. It hung limp in their arms. They laid it down again. The skipper knelt beside and turned it over, with its face to the sky. The brown eyes didn't look frightened at all, didn't even look puzzled.

The skivvy was dead.

The Frontiersman's Rifle

By

Warren Hastings Miller

IT IS not often nowadays that one has the pleasure of shooting a match with the old time muzzle loading flintlock and percussion cap rifles, so a first hand account of their performance may be of interest to the fraternity of outdoorsmen.

Occasionally one sees one of these old weapons of our forefathers, usually rusty and in a state of disuse and disrepair, kept mainly as a curiosity in the gunrack. As a matter of fact there never was a shooting iron more exactly adapted to the purpose than this same rifle carried by Boone and Crockett. Built like a violin, accurate to a hair, hard hitting, with a very flat trajectory, and economical in powder and lead, there could not have been a better weapon for deer and Indians.

Given the most modern rifle we have Boone would have put it aside for his own. This seems a strong statement, but consider the frontiersman's conditions— A powder horn, a bullet mould, buckskin patches and spare flints carried in the butt pocket of his rifle. These were his ammunition requirements, simple, light to carry for a hundred loads and inexpensive.

Contrast this with a hundred .35 caliber Winchester shells. Weight and expense tell at once heavily in favor of the older rifle, to say nothing of the ease of obtaining its ammunition. And then the rifle itself. Of about .41 caliber, it shot a round ball of some hundred and fifty grains, but driven by a dram and three quarters of powder, giving an exceedingly flat trajectory, sighting zero at a hundred yards and overshooting not more than two inches at fifty.

Its grouping, that is, its consistency, was close enough to make one single ragged hole with five shots at fifty yards, and to get three turkey heads out of five shots at a hundred, which was often done in pioneer turkey shoots. Its heavy barrel lay quietly on the left palm, no wavering to correct for windage and false balance. Its sights were marvels of definition in the gray background of the woods, far better than any of our own, however good they may be on targets in the open.

A friend of mine owned a collection of Kreiders and other old American rifles, two of them flintlock. They were all in good shooting order, beautifully kept and oiled. More than that, my friend had all the ancient accessories—the powder horns, bullet moulds, patches, flints, percussion caps, and often we would go for an afternoon's shooting. A pound of shot and a half pound horn of powder was good for a whole afternoon of delight.

Our favorite mark was a 2¼ in. Sterno can set afloat on the waves of the lake. At a hundred and ten yards we would begin shooting at it. That it went under by the third shot shows the accuracy and consistency of those old rifles. Another mark was a block of wood about two inches cube set atop an iron rod. Back of it was a huge granite cliff for a backstop. The wood being dark neutral color and the granite old red gray, it was a fine test of definition. Over the brass leaf sight, close down on the barrel, that neutral mark would stand out clearly when almost invisible before our modern beads and military fronts. The rear sight was a mere flat bar, sometimes with a notch, more often not.

The frontiersman depended upon that rear bar to cut off as much or little of the front sight as his judgment of the range told him was the thing. He wasted no time on ladders or folding leaves! He knew his rifle—just what it would do at any and all ranges.

That stationary mark gave us a chance to measure trajectories. There seems to be an impression abroad that the trajectory of those old rifles was about that of a watermelon hurled at a fleeing negro. Nothing could be further from the facts. It was less than two inches mid-trajectory at a hundred yards. The nearest modern rifle, the .32-20 H.V. has a mid-trajectory of four inches.

The answer is that that light round bullet was driven by a dram and three quarters of powder. Being round it, would not run wild when over driven, as happens often with modern light bullet rifles. We found the granite shattered and the bullet smashed, for there was plenty of force in that bullet.

IN SHOOTING a flintlock the first thing to remember was to hold through while the charge was igniting. There was a perceptible interval between the flash of the pan and the discharge of the rifle, not a fifth of a second, perhaps, but enough to lose the aim and shoot high unless one attended strictly to the mark while the gun was going off. Otherwise the flintlocks shot as well as the later percussion cap rifles. The flints were four square, giving four edges to use in the hammer grip before the flint was worn out and began to misfire. A curious frontiersman's trick was to wet the flint edge with the tongue before firing. It gave more and better sparks that way, though why I can not say.

When the hammer comes down the first thing it does is to knock up the pan cover. This is a kind of tall steel ear with a spring holding the cover of the priming pan down tight. Almost instantaneous is the action of the hammer striking and throwing up that cover ear, striking sparks over the lower edge of it and showering them down on the exposed priming. It is almost sure fire at any reasonable cant of the gun, but if held sidewise the priming may fall out the moment uncovered and will take fire but may not set off the charge. The flints vary in efficiency, some lasting through a whole afternoon of firing, some going dead after about twenty shots.

Boone's old rifle was a poem of woodland efficiency. From the settlements he got his keg of pwder, his ingots of lead; and these were all he really needed. Flints and buckskin for patches were to be had in the wilderness; the horn and the bullet mould anywhere in the backwoods. He had a matchless weapon for deer, turkey, bear and Indians. He had only one shot, but in the interests of economy, he made that one shot count.

The later percussion cap rifle, which reigned from about 1830 to 1870, differed from the old flintlock in only two respects—its greater speed of explosion and its refinement. The hair trigger was now possible. All my friend's Krieders had them. Almost instantaneously before shooting you drew the set trigger; then the lightest touch on the hair trigger set off the rifle. Also, as deer and turkey became more and more woodsman's game, the caliber dropped to .34 and the barrel became lighter and shorter, about 32 inch as compared with 36 and 40 for the older flintlock.

These Krieders were handsome, built with loving pride in workmanship. The preferred stock was curly maple. In the butt was always the brass pocket with cover, which holds about a hundred buckskin patches. They liked a good ornamental buttplate, with long curled ears that would grip the shoulder. The long heavy barrel was octagonal steel and most of the weight of the rifle was there. It held so steadily that you could look away from the mark, then get into your sights again and still find them where you left them.

In accuracy—well, nail drivers, they called them—and it was not a fanciful name.

Beginning

The DANCE *of the* SCARLET LEOPARDS

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

CHAPTER I

MANCHURIA—1921

"THE WORLD'S next great battlefield!"

The words echoed in Davies' ears as he watched the Manchurian landscape roll by. Certainly there was some justification for the belief when, looking off to the west he could see the beginnings of outer Mongolia, stretching far away to the highlands of Tibet, and looking to the east could see the great fertile plains of Manchuria. To the north lay Siberia, extending its vast plains and forests and frozen tundras into the Arctic regions.

Converging here in Manchuria were the advance guard forces of great and powerful groups. Bolshevik Russia, in the same manner as the former empire of the Czars, still felt her destiny urging her southward. China, with its teeming millions, moved northward, settling thousands of acres with her colonists. Japan, crowded on her tiny islets, flanking the continent of Asia, was grasping covetously at the great fertile spaces of this huge hinterland and slowly moving toward the common center. A collision of these vast forces was almost inevitable. Even now their close contact was beginning to generate friction.

And what was Davies, an American officer, doing up there?

"Major—" Sergeant Duggan, sunk in thought, had roused himself— "Major, I don't believe that Catron guy is anywheres near here. At Peking they said he was at Mukden, at Mukden they said he was at Harbin. At Harbin they say he's at Hailar and at Hailar they'll probably say he's at Manchouli. We're gettin' to Hailar in a few minutes and it's dollars to doughnuts they'll tell us he's gone on up the line." Duggan shook a pessimistic head. "There's somethin' kinda funny about that guy, Major; it begins to smell peculiar."

Davies nodded silently, and stared at the landscape again.

"I don't believe that bird wants to be caught up with, Major," volunteered Duggan.

"I'm beginning to think you're right at that."

Davies, his tall frame clothed in riding breeches and boots and Norfolk jacket, raised a troubled eye toward the sergeant sitting opposite him in the large compartment. The sergeant was dressed in civilian clothes as well. To the casual observer, the two Americans might have passed as commercial travelers or tourists —that is if the casual traveler did not recognize the unmistakable manner of carrying the shoulders, of keeping the head up, of wearing clothes.

The British courier, "king's messenger",

The Americans had yet to learn the lesson of relentless Asia, which says: "Once an enemy is in your power, see to it that never again can he do you wrong."

had not been deceived for a second. After one quick glance he had opened his cigaret case and a conversation at the same time.

"What was it that Britisher said this morning about Catron?" Duggan broke in on Davies' thoughts.

"It wasn't what he said." Davies frowned in perplexity. "It was what he left unsaid that worried me."

After all, little was known about Catron when he had been detailed from the embassy at Peking to get first hand information on what Japan and the others were doing in Siberia. His first report had come through from Tientsin. That was two weeks ago. A second report, a brief affair, had followed, evidently sent back from some small way station on the Chinese Eastern Railway, stating that he was being closely followed and was in danger. After that came silence.

Then a wandering Standard Oil man had drifted into Peking announcing that he had met Catron, that Catron had some very important information concerning the Japanese plans in Manchuria and Siberia and that Catron was acting very

queerly. As day after day went by, with no further word, Davies, acting as assistant military attaché, was finally detailed to seek out the man and discover what it was all about.

THEY were approaching the station of Hailar. This town, so close to the Siberian border, looked very much as did the other mushroom towns along this railway, overnight growths, strange combinations of well built Russian buildings, ramshackle Chinese shacks and conglomerate huts which housed refugee Russians, shaggy Cossacks, itinerant Korean coolies, Kalmucks, Tartars, Japanese and all the strange *mélange* of races which drifted to this debatable ground on the borderlands.

A wild press of coolies, Chinese and Korean, fought for their bags as Davies and Duggan alighted. A huge Russian *isvoschek* in a three-horse *troika* beamed at them so invitingly that Davies took his carriage in preference to the press of other vociferous cabmen. They drove through the slowly darkening streets as the lamp lighters set about their tasks, and came at last to the hotel.

The hotel was crowded. Russians, both refugee Whites and triumphant Reds, Japanese, Europeans of all nationalities, and Chinese, filled the place, their steady hum of conversation making a true Babel of tongues. Davies was surprised to notice the large number of German commercial travelers, back almost in their pre-war numbers, although it was only 1921 and the Americans still occupied the Coblenz bridgehead.

There being an hour before dinner, the two strolled forth to see the town, heading in the general direction of the telegraph office to see whether any messages had come through.

There was a telegram in cipher. Davies translated:

IMPORTANT NEW DEVELOPMENTS MAKE IT IMPERATIVE SECURE CATRON AT ALL COSTS. TAKE OVER HIS DUTIES SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VON UNGERN AT URGA AND HIS BACKERS. ACKNOWLEDGE.

"It doesn't seem to have occurred to them," remarked Davies mildly, "to send along any information as to the new developments they talk about. And who the devil is Ungern and where the hell is Urga?"

They were walking back toward the hotel, approaching it through a narrow side street lined with warehouses. It had grown quite dark. The street was silent. Suddenly the silence was broken by a hoarse shout.

Davies and Duggan stood, listening. They heard the shout followed by the sound of running footsteps. Still they waited. The noise seemed to be coming from the right, down a small alleyway. Above the sound of footsteps they heard a high pitched, despairing scream. Now these towns along the railway were filled with marauders, the outcasts of all nations, living by thievery and robbery and murder so that it was unsafe to go unarmed. Davies and Duggan, knowing this, were comfortable, each in the possession of a good solid lump under his arm, an automatic pistol, snugly ensconced in a holster.

In the shadows of the corner of one of the warehouses a confused group swayed around some object on the ground.

Davies, leaping among them, saw the figure of a man prone in the dust. Standing over it, kicking the huddled figure dispassionately, was a vaguely familiar form. What the rights or wrongs of the business were did not matter. Here was somebody kicking a man who was down. It wasn't being done in the best sporting circles, and that was that, reflected Davies swiftly as he let drive at the big form of the man doing the kicking. His fist crashed through a tangle of beard and landed on the point of a jaw. Davies heard a grunt and saw the man reel and fall to the ground. Turning, he saw Duggan chasing the two other attackers, both of whom were putting all the distance possible between themselves and the suddenly arrived Americans. Duggan returned, puffing.

"The yellow scum!" panted Duggan.

"I didn't get a single good crack at them. Hello! you kinda got one!"

He stared at the recumbent form of the heavy figure, which Davies had tumbled; it started to scramble to its feet.

"Just a minute, old kid," admonished the sergeant, and placed his open hand, a generous hand, against the man's face and pushed him back to the ground from whence he came. "Let's see what's the damages here before you start out again on your nefarious career." Reaching into his pocket, he brought forth a pocket light and flashed it on the groaning form of the victim. "Seems to be some kind of a chink, Major."

Davies looking down in the small circle cast by the light, saw a lean faced, almond eyed, dark skinned man with high cheek bones. As he looked, the man opened his eyes and stared upward. Both Americans were startled. There was something so ineffably indifferent, so overwhelmingly proud and unyielding about the gaze which met theirs that both Duggan and Davies were impressed.

But their attention was attracted to the other man, who again was attempting to arise.

Duggan flashed the light on him.

On the ground, half raised on one elbow, his eyes gleaming with hostility, lay a tall, red bearded Russian whom they had observed in the hotel and remarked because of his jovial expression.

"If it ain't our old friend, Santa Claus," Duggan remarked.

The Russian growled something unintelligible and rose to his feet.

Duggan, reaching forward, grasped the ends of the man's beard, holding them in a powerful grasp.

"What'll we do with Don Whiskerando, Major?" he asked Davies.

"Oh, let him go."

Davies turned his attention to the recumbent figure of the Mongol as Duggan, swinging the Russian around by the beard, impelled him on his way with the aid of a powerful kick. The bearded stranger, half stumbling, half running, disappeared from view. The Americans had yet to learn the lesson of relentless Asia, which says once an enemy is in your power see to it that he can do no more damage.

The Mongol on the ground was weakly stirring in an attempt to rise. The light of the pocket lamp showed him to be a man of many years. He was richly clad in a long silken yellow robe. Davies and Duggan aided him to his feet. The old fellow leaned weakly against them for a moment, then breathed deeply and closed his eyes.

"Feeling better?" asked Davies, in English, with no hope that the man would understand anything except the tone.

To his surprise the other replied in the same language:

"Thank you, yes," he said, in a guttural tone with an accent and pronunciation unfamiliar to Davies.

"If you will bear with me a moment my servants will come. I am calling them now," the man went on.

Davies looked at him in surprise. Duggan smiled understandingly, pointing to his forehead as much as to say that the old fellow was a little dizzy.

"May we take you to your home?" asked Davies indulgently.

"No; if you will wait, my people will come. I have called them," returned the old fellow gravely and courteously, so gravely and so courteously, that they could do nothing, perforce, but humor him.

But suddenly there was the sound of running feet. Around the corner came six or eight men, tall, fierce looking fellows who charged up threateningly to Davies and Duggan. A word from the old fellow made them relax instantly.

"Will you come with me?" asked the venerable one.

"We would be very glad to see you safely to your door."

Davies bowed his acknowledgement and he and Duggan followed behind, speaking in whispers.

"Did you get that business the old bird pulls. 'I'm callin' them now,' he says and

never lets out a peep. And by all that's holy, sure enough, they come! How do you figger that out, Major? Who is he anyways?"

"Beats me," responded Davies. "Looks as though he might be one of these Buddhist lamas in from Tibet or Mongolia somewhere."

There was a long silence from Duggan.

Finally his voice came, uncertainly.

"I seen one o' them llamas once, Major. As I remember, it was four legged and had a hump and long wool, and come from South America somewheres."

"No, that's a different variety of lama," said Davies. "This kind is a priest of the Buddhist religion. There are a lot of them about here to the west."

He pointed out toward the edge of town, which they were now approaching, where, in the dim light, they could see the Mongolian plain rolling out to lose itself in the darkness, a darkness faintly relieved by the distant gleam of the campfire of some nomad far out in the velvety depths.

FOLLOWING their newly found acquaintance, at last they came to a courtyard surrounded by dark buildings. They could hear the stamping and restless movement of innumerable horses. In the center of the courtyard was a large, dark, dome shaped mass. Following their guides to this, they found it to be on closer view, some sort of tent. A door was opened and they were ushered in.

Inside a large circular dwelling with a dirt floor disclosed itself. Around this, a trellis work of laths four or five feet high formed the wall. Above them a number of laths radiated from a point in the top. The sides and roof were covered with a layer of felt, tied on with camel's hair rope and leather thongs.

The floor was covered with rugs and felt mats, except in the center, where, on the hard baked clay, stood an iron fireplace in which burned the flame of dried dung. Round the walls, forming a back rest, were piled Chinese chests, intricately carved and colored. On either side of the tent or *yurta* were couches made of wood, carved and painted in barbaric colors. On the chests were vessels of brass and massive silver.

This first view of a Mongolian habitation interested Davies, who knew that this same form of tent had been used by the nomads from time immemorial, that a *yurta* of the same fashion had sheltered Genghis Khan and his descendants; that, from close to the Arctic circle to down far against the southern seas, millions of nomads were born, lived and died in such habitations.

The old man whom they had rescued from the Russians was helped to one of the couches. Servants unrolled a beautiful Bokhara rug, on which Davies and Duggan were invited to seat themselves.

Silver cups filled with a sweetish-sourish liquid were brought, and they drank the *koumiss*, finding it not unpleasant to the taste.

The old man spoke to his servants in a low tone. From the respect and veneration they showed him, he was evidently a personage of some standing.

"I am happy to welcome you to such poor hospitality as I am permitted to offer."

The voice of the old man came clear and strong and resonant.

"We are extremely appreciative of it," responded Davies.

Two servants came in, carrying low, lacquered tables, setting them down before the Americans and before the old man.

"I am the Maramba Ta-Rimpo-Cha," explained the old chap quietly. "I am a Doctor of Theology, and I serve the Living Buddha, His Holiness Bogdo Ghegan, Djebtsung Damba Hutuktu Khan, High Pontiff of Urga, the Holy City of Mongolia."

"We are honored," Davies responded gravely. "I have never before had the pleasure of meeting any high functionary of the Buddhist faith. I am very desirous of learning more about the Living Buddha; perhaps you would be good enough to enlighten me."

The servants were placing massive, hammered silver plates on the tables, bringing from outside somewhere steaming, succulent meats, tender lamb and kid, high silver jugs of tea and wine, more plates containing aromatic *zatouran* covered with sheep fat, plates of *borsuk*, sweet rich cakes and dishes of nuts and milk.

"You are of high caste in your country?" the Maramba inquired of Davies as one stating a fact.

"We have no castes in my country."

"Where there are two men there will be two castes," stated the Maramba gravely. "You are a warrior, and your companion, he is also a warrior of lesser grade. But now you are seekers. You earnestly desire to find something or some one."

"But how do you know these things?" Davies and Duggan stared at each other and back to the sonorous voiced old man.

"I have been in your souls and I know," he answered simply.

They were eating as he spoke. The servants came and went silently. The fire in the center of the *yurta* cast flickering shadows on the walls, now showing up the old Maramba's face in clear light, again bathing it in dusky shadow, out of which his eyes continued to gaze, kindly, observant and yet impersonal.

"You have asked me about the Living Buddha at Ta-Kure. Because in your souls there is desire for knowledge, because you have come out of the darkness with compassion in your hearts to drive away the oppressor and aid an old man beset by his enemies, I, Maramba Ta-Rimpo-Cha, a prince of the Mongols in my own right Kanpo-Gelong of Ta-Kure, Tzuren and Ta Lama (High Priest, Diviner and Doctor) Keeper of the Sacred Books and right hand of his Holiness the Pontiff of Ta-Kure, will enlighten you."

HIS VOICE went on as the two listened, deeply interested. Of Tibet he told them and the Dalai Lama, the head of the Buddhist faith, of his vice regent, the Living Buddha, the Pontiff of Ta-Kure or Urga.

As the old man talked they heard that this Living Buddha was the incarnation of the never dying Buddha, the present day representative of the unbroken line of spiritual lords ruling since 1670, joining in themselves the spirit of Buddha Amitaba with the Compassionate Spirit of the Mountains, Chan-ra-zi, having to do with the vast peaks of the Himalayas, the Indian mysteries, the law of the stern Mongolian conquerors, the wisdom of the Chinese sages of the Hundred Books and all the history of Asia, the Olet Khans, Batur Hun Taiga and Gushi, Genghis and Kubla Khan, the hierarchy of the lamas, the edicts of the Tibetan kings from the far days of Srong-Tsang Gampo, and the sternness of the Yellow Sect of Paspa. They heard how the history of Mongolia, Persia, China, Pamir, the Himalayas, and Mesopotamia is interwoven with the Living Buddha and how he is worshiped throughout the vast stretches of Central Asia, northward to the Arctic circle.

His voice went on, telling of the Holy City of Urga from which the Living Buddha rules over Mongolia, surrounded by sixty thousand lamas, doctors, priests, fortune tellers, soothsayers, writers and teachers, of the priceless gifts bestowed upon the great monastery, offerings of true believers from all over the world, of the great library containing records of the miracles of the thirty-one Living Buddhas, books of magic and mystery, and the books of the Hundred Chinese Wise Men.

"Into this secret library," remarked the Maramba, simply, "only his Holiness, Bogda Ghegen, and myself, can enter. And only his Holiness can touch the great ring of Genghis Khan, the ruby ring carved with the swastika."

The sonorous voice of the old Maramba came to a stop. Davies and Duggan involuntarily sighed with the relaxation from the tension with which they had been listening.

"And Bogda Khan is temporal as well as spiritual ruler, you say?" asked Davies after a silence.

"His Holiness is khan of outer Mongolia," responded the Maramba. Then

his face became clouded. "Once," he said proudly, "the Mongols ruled China. Today we are dust beneath the Chinese feet. They strive utterly to overthrow us. While the Manchus ruled in Peking we were subject to them. When the emperors were driven out, Mongolia declared itself independent under its own khans. This independence was ratified by the Chinese Republic. But today the Chinese have returned and abrogated their treaty and strive to overcome us."

"And this," inquired Davies gently, "is why an important and revered high priest comes from Urga to Hailar?"

The Maramba nodded, then turned toward Davies, his eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"And you, my friend, what of your search? Would you have aid in your task?"

Davies nodded, curious to find out more of this strange man.

The Maramba clapped his hands. Two servants entered and waited with bowed heads for his commands. He spoke to them in a low voice. They went immediately to one of the great Chinese carved chests against the wall and opened it. The chest resolved itself into a portable altar with a silver statue of Buddha enthroned within it, resting on an expanse of scarlet silk.

The servants lighted two candles on either side, candles set in slender gold candlesticks. As they went out, they struck a gong which hung against the wall. In the echoing murmur of its golden ring, Davies heard the Maramba praying, praying with bowed head as he fingered a string of coral beads attached to his wrist.

"*Om mani padme hum,*" intoned the Maramba.

"*Om mani padme hum,*" the echo seemed to sigh all around them from the top of the tent, from the walls, from the breeze stirring without.

The gong sounded a deeply sonorous note although now no hand could be seen to strike it. The candles guttered and flared, the dim light of the fire died down. In the shadows and the darkness Duggan and Davies instinctively drew more closely to each other. Again came that deep resonant boom from the gong.

THE MARAMBA was speaking in whispers, his words came more clearly. Finally they could understand. He was speaking in English. His words came slowly and smoothly in a strange voice, as if from far away.

"Great are the tribulations in store for the warriors. The ravens shall hover over them, the wolves prepare for their coming, the evil spirits of the mountains rejoice. Those whom they shall befriend shall perish. Those whom they shall combat shall flourish. Death shall stand over them. Brother shall merit the curses of the gods by slaying brother. Sister shall sacrifice herself for a thing which is less than the dust. By the willow trees of Van Kure all will be revealed. Let them beware of the man with soft hands. Let them beware of the man with the greenish eyes. Let them show no mercy to disputants and men of little faith. Let them, above all, beware the scarlet leopard. Let them take heed for death is ready and waiting, waiting by the willow trees of Van Kure. I have spoken."

There was silence in the *yurta.* No sound disturbed the quiet; the horses, whose movements they had heard plainly, were silent as if carved in stone. The silence of the *yurta* was broken again by the clear voice of the Maramba.

"If you would find that which you ask, look beyond the statue of Our Blessed Lord Buddha."

Davies and Duggan both gazed at the silver figure, gleaming in the lights cast by the candles from their slender golden holders. All was shadow behind the figure of the god. But as they gazed the shadows seemed to stir and take form. They were shot through with faint luminous lines of scarlet. The lines of scarlet wavered and undulated, slowly taking form. They seemed to be weaving themselves into the likeness of a man. The dim figure assumed life and shape.

Davies rubbed his eyes.

For the dim form behind the silver statue of the Buddha resolved itself in the likeness of Catron, the agent who had so strangely disappeared. But Catron, unlike when they had last seen him, was not dressed in quiet blue serge, but on the contrary was in uniform, a strange uniform, of khaki, with a peculiarly shaped pink hat, the shade pink that one sees on the inside of a melon. Across his chest bars of red were emblazoned. He was wearing the uniform of a Bolshevist soldier and the pink cap of the Cheka, that mysterious all encompassing secret service of the Soviets.

As they looked the light slowly faded. Again the shadows behind the figure of Buddha grew dim and dark.

They heard the Maramba clap his hands again. The servants entered. He spoke to them in his own tongue. They brought a small lacquered box to him. From it he took a small object.

"My friend, I am giving you something that may aid you. Cherish it. It is a symbol venerated highly in certain places, by certain people."

He handed to Davies the small object. The servants brought lights. Examining the tiny thing, Davies saw that it was a small box hollowed out from a single large amethyst which glowed a beautiful lavender shade. Inlaid on its top was a Chinese ideograph. The thing was skillfully worked. Twisting it in his fingers, he found that there was a cover to it, a small screw top that opened under his touch. As the cover came off, the tent was filled with a peculiarly intoxicating odor, compounded of the scent of wildflowers in the forest and a tinge of sweet scented temple incense. So penetrating was the perfume that it seemed to fill the whole tent. Davies replaced the cover, screwing the amethyst cap back in place. Suddenly the sweetly penetrating perfume vanished, the leathery, acrid odor of the *yurta* returned. Again they could hear the stamping of the horses and the movement of life outside in the courtyard.

They took leave of the Maramba, who was sunk in thought, his head bent low in his hands as they reached the door.

"We shall meet again within the month near the willow trees of Van Kure," he called after them.

CHAPTER II

THE STEPPES ARE CRUEL AND HEAVEN IS FAR

THEY stumbled through the dark courtyard, saying nothing until they reached the street.

"Did—" Davies hesitated, then went on with a rush—"did you see anything peculiar behind the statue of the Buddha?" he asked Duggan.

"Kinda thought I saw that guy Catron all decked out in a trick get up."

"Red tabs across his chest?"

"Yes, sir, and a funny kinda pink lookin' cap on his head like them Bolshies wear."

Davies nodded.

"Blame funny business all round; must be sort of hypnotic power the old boy possesses," he remarked half to himself.

"Some baby, that old what do you call it? Marimba? What's all that stuff he was gettin' off about green eyed men, soft handed lads?"

"Told us to beware of a man with green eyes and to beware of a man with soft hands. Also a lot of stuff about brothers and sisters that I didn't get. Brother shall kill brother and sister shall sacrifice herself for something less than the dust. I'm damned if I could follow him there. But it was pretty creepy at that. What do you suppose made that gong ring?"

Duggan shook a puzzled head.

"Queer business," he commented.

"Queer business is right!" echoed Davies. Both men returned silently to the hotel.

AS THEY approached it they heard the sound of wild singing and laughter above the strident music of an orchestra. The dining room was filled with a gay crowd, thick with tobacco

smoke, noisy with the clatter of dishes and the high pitched voices of a multitude. It was like coming back to civilization after having been in the outer darkness of barbarism.

Duggan demurred at entering with Davies, the two of them being of the regular Army and accustomed to its strict rules.

"Forget it!" Davies admonished. "We are not officer and soldier; we are a couple of civilians on a confidential mission. We've got to stick around and get all the information we can. Let's go."

They entered, attracting little notice in that gay crowd, most of whom were Russians. Finding a table near the wall they sat down to observe the gathering. The place was jammed. At a large table in the center of the room was a group of refugee White Russian officers, many of them in their old uniforms. The greater part of them were attired in the trim, full skirted Cossack coat with its row of ivory cartridge cases across the chest and the curving blade of the jeweled-handled dagger slung at the belt. Two of the officers wore the green and gold of a famous former Imperial Guard Regiment, one was in the wine colored coat of a Cossack of the Caucasus, several were attired in the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks, while still another was gay in the sky blue and silver of the Dragoons. All bore enameled and jeweled decorations. Evidently it was a gala occasion, thus to bring them out in this former glory.

Discreet inquiry of the waiter provided the answer—it was the birthday of the former Czarevitch which they had seized upon as an occasion to celebrate.

Davies, watching them, was suddenly filled with an intense pity for these shreds and remnants of the once great empire of the Czars, that glorious golden edifice so strangely rotten at the core. How quickly it had been swept out of existence by the red cloud of Bolshevism, how keenly tragic, how frightfully sudden had been its collapse!

The orchestra struck up a famous cavalry galloping song, a wild air, some heritage from Tartar ancestry, that swept one into dreams of galloping *sotnias*, of the earth covered with hordes of horsemen, of the plains moving in a veritable forest of lances, of the sky full of ravens darkening the sun with their expectant wings.

"Goofy damn' music!" commented Duggan.

"They're Hungarian Gipsies playing Russian airs, a hellish combination," Davies replied, listening as the music went up and up and the voices of the crowd chimed in until the dining room roared with the tuneful surge of men's voices raised in exultant song.

Suddenly it stopped, and the clatter and confusion of the filled dining room resumed its sway. To Davies, sitting there, thinking about the three great empires converging on this spot in the earth's surface, it seemed particularly fitting and appropriate that men should sing of war and the clash of swords.

To their table, walking somewhat unsteadily, came a tall young Russian, in the uniform of a Cossack of the Ussuri, his golden shoulder tabs showing the rank of a centurion or leader of a hundred Cossacks, a *sotnia*. Tall, well built, dreamy eyed, he was a splendid figure in the close fitting Cossack coat, walking with all the ease and grace of a tiger in the soft Russian boots.

"*Kok ve posheevietey!*" he called cheerily, in that half drunken state of friendliness that a Russian can approximate so easily.

"*Chorashaw!* Well!" answered Davies.

The young Russian slumped into a chair at their table.

"*Russki?* Russian?" he asked.

"*Nyet. Amerikanski.* No. American." Davies answered the query.

The Russian looked up swiftly, his face extremely delighted.

"*Ochinn chorashaw!*" "Very fine!" he smiled, and then switching into English, "I knew many Americans when they were in Siberia. But there are some bad ones there now. You have heard maybe of the one at Chita?"

"No," Davies leaned forward curiously. "Who is he and why is he bad?"

"He is a traitor," the Russian informed him gravely, "a traitor to his country and his race. He has turned Bolsheviki. I saw him yesterday. I have just come from Chita, escaped from there by the grace of God. He was wearing the ugly pink cap of the Cheka, that foul secret service of the Soviets."

Duggan and Davies looked swiftly at each other, then back to the Russian.

"And what was his name? Do you remember?" Davies asked after a pregnant silence in which the breathing of the two Americans grew almost audible.

"Cat—Cateron. Or something like that; I forget." The Russian grinned amiably. "Won't you have a bottle with me?"

He clapped his hands for the waiter and ordered wine, not noticing the silence of his new found friends.

"Yes," went on the Russian, "he is a dirty dog. Such a one should be killed like a dog, like a mad dog. Myself I would not waste a bullet on him. I would have him beaten to death with the *tashur*."

"And what is the *tashur*?" asked Davies.

"The bamboo stick they carry in Mongolia. It is a death very good for traitors. It gives them time to think over their crimes before they die at last, cursing and screaming."

THE BOTTLE of wine was brought, the glasses were filled.

"You Russians take death very easily," remarked Davies.

"Why not? What is life anyway? A puff of dry snow raised for a moment by the wind, to whirl about over the waste for a breath and then to sink back again to its drift. I myself have very few days to live."

"Why do you say that?" asked Davies curiously.

"Why? Because I return to Chita tomorrow to kill a Bolshevik who has put a slight upon my sister."

"Your sister? You have a sister back there?"

"No, she is here; wait, I will call her."

He rose, staggering over to the large table. Once there he spoke to a slim officer likewise in the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks. The slim officer followed him willingly enough. Once arrived at the table, Davies and Duggan rubbed their eyes. For the slim, boyish looking, newly arrived officer was a girl and a beautiful girl at that, with a haunting, wistful sort of wild beauty about her that was arresting and compelling.

"Natasha—" the tall young Russian turned toward her—"these are some brave American friends of mine. I want you to know them."

The girl turned toward them.

"My brother is always very gay when he has had many drinks. I hope he has not annoyed you?"

Davies rose swiftly, his astonishment under control.

"But, mademoiselle, we are delighted! Won't you join us?"

Wine was poured. The three men raised their glasses in polite toast to the fresh cheeked, soft eyed girl.

"What is this about your brother going to Chita tomorrow? I should think once he had escaped from the Bolsheviki with his life he would be anxious to remain away from those people."

"So I have told him," she replied with a shrug, "but he is very hot tempered. There was one there that was rude to me, a gross Bolshevik commissar. He said that he would make me a woman of the streets. I tried very hard to kill him," she added quietly, "but he took my knife away. Now my brother wants to kill him." She looked at the two Americans gravely through her great eyes. "It is all very silly, is it not?"

"It certainly doesn't seem very sensible," agreed Davies.

The orchestra struck up again, a surging, sweeping song in which all the dining room joined so that the rafters fairly trembled with the outburst of voices. The young Russian officer with them joined in, pounding the table with his glass until he broke it into fragments.

As suddenly as it began, the song finished.

"I've never heard that one before. What is it?" asked Davies.

"Oh," explained the girl, "it is a song about a hero, an officer, named Semyon."

"What did he do to get a song written about him?"

"It is an old story, about the days when Charles the Twelfth, the Swedish king, attacked Russia. Semyon was in a fort that was attacked. He volunteered to go back for more men. His sweetheart went with him. It was winter and the woods were full of wolves. So bad did the wolves become that they nearly stopped the sleigh. So the officer, Semyon, kissed his sweetheart goodby and threw her to the wolves. Therefore the wolves stopped to eat his sweetheart and he was able to go on and get the troops to come and help his comrades. Was not that brave?"

"Why—er," Davies temporized, "it seems as though ideals of bravery differ a little in different countries. Do *you* think it was brave of this fellow, Semyon?"

"Of course," she replied, "very brave."

"Suppose you were the sweetheart, would you want to be thrown to the wolves?"

She threw up her head proudly.

"He would not have to throw me to the wolves. I would already have thrown myself if I had seen that I could help my lover and his comrades."

Davies looked at her admiringly.

"I believe you would at that," he said reflectively, then to her brother, "What are your plans after you have slaughtered this offensive commissar?"

"Then I shall join Baron Ungern at Urga. He is mobilizing the Asiatic Division of cavalry against the Bolsheviki and needs trained men."

Both Americans pricked up their ears.

"What sort of a place is this Urga?" asked Davies.

"Oh, it's one of the holiest places known to the Buddhists. They have a lot of lamas there and many relics."

"Do you happen to have heard of a venerable old lama called Maramba Ta-Rimpo-Cha?"

"Is there any one that does not know him? He is known from one end of Asia to the other. He is a very holy man."

Davies nodded at Duggan.

"What has this Baron Ungern got to do with the Buddhists at Urga?"

"Why, Baron Ungern is a Buddhist."

"He is mad, quite mad!" the sister interrupted, touching her forehead.

"How can you say that, Natasha!" he reproved. "He is not mad; he believes that he can weld together all the wandering nomads of Asia and use them against the Bolsheviki. Also he is fighting for the independence of outer Mongolia against the Chinese who wish to destroy the independence. He is very strict."

The sister interrupted with a scornful laugh.

"Strict?" she laughed again. "He is a mad dog. He will have his own officers slain at the crook of a finger. He is mad, I tell you. He knows not what he does; all he can do is shed blood. If he can not shed the blood of his enemies he will kill his own men. He is not called the Bloody Mad Baron for nothing."

THE MUSIC had died down. There was a lull in the talk from the dining room. The voice of the girl, clear and melodious, carried farther than she knew. Suddenly the officers at the next table were on their feet.

A form loomed behind Davies.

"Take care how you speak of Baron Wilhelm Von Ungern!" a voice rasped in their ears. They turned quickly.

A short, squat bodied Russian officer stood above them. His eyes were peculiarly colorless and opaque. His hands, which clenched and unclenched nervously, were remarkably white and soft looking, like the hands of a woman.

"What is that?" asked Davies mildly.

"I said," the man spoke more loudly, "to take care of how you speak of Baron Wilhelm Von Ungern!"

Davies hitched his shoulders a little impatiently.

"Really, my dear fellow," he expostulated mildly, "I don't quite see what business it is of yours just what we say or leave unsaid at this table."

"I will make it my business." The officer gripped the back of Davies' chair with his soft white hands as though to shake him out of it. "I warn you once again, I will not tolerate any such language used toward my chief."

Davies rose quietly, turning to face the man.

"As far as I am concerned," he remarked quietly and pleasantly, "both you and your chief can go to hell by the shortest route."

The little blood in the stranger's face seemed to drain out. His opaque, colorless eyes turned red Suddenly his twisting fingers leaped at Davies' throat. The fingers were soft enough but they gripped like steel. For one paralyzing second Davies felt their powerful hold. Then he broke the grip in the one certain and unfailing way to break such a grip, a vicious stroke known to ju-jutsu.

There was a roar from the Russian and he half collapsed, twisting with pain. Suddenly the friends of the aggressive one came up and dragged him away, expostulating. He threw an angry glance behind at Davies, then stopped, shaking his fist. Davies continued to gaze at him as one might at some curious creature seen for the first time.

As he turned he surprised a glow of admiration in the eyes of the girl.

"How wonderful!" she breathed. "So quiet, so fine! No hysterics as always with us when we grow angry. Truly you are a hero!"

Davies blushed and avoided Duggan's eyes. The young Russian officer grasped his hand.

"Splendid," he cried. "That was Seepalov, the baron's executioner. He is said to be a terrible creature."

Duggan had been silent throughout the encounter, smoking quietly, but now he leaned over, speaking in a low tone.

"Did you notice that he had very soft hands, Major?" he asked casually.

Davies nodded shortly.

"Soft to look at—not so soft to feel," he said, rubbing his throat.

"The more I think about the old Maramba the creepier it gets," continued Duggan, his forehead wrinkled in thought. "First the dope about Catron being a Bolshevik and now this soft handed guy trying to throttle you!"

"Be sure you never go into Baron Ungern's territory!" The young Russian officer leaned over. "This executioner is very powerful; he will have you killed immediately."

"No chance," laughed Davies. "I haven't the remotest intention of going into the baron's territory. By the way," he asked the young Russian, "where is Van Kure?"

"That is on the other side of Urga."

"Is it in the baron's territory?"

"Yes."

Duggan listened, nodding his head. Davies drew back thoughtfully, then shrugged his shoulders, turning his attention to the girl again.

"Why do so many Russian women serve as soldiers?" he asked.

"Oh, it is our heritage. In the old Russian folk-songs they sing about the Polyanitza, who were women heroes like the men heroes of antiquity. It has always been so in Russia that woman fights beside her man."

"Sort of Battalion of Death stuff?"

"Yes," she replied simply, "I was with the Battalion of Death. I have been decorated for bravery twice and wounded three times."

She gave this astounding information without the quiver of an eyelid. Davies looked at her brother for confirmation.

"Yes, Natasha is a vicious fighter. She has been in many engagements."

DUGGAN studied the slim, quiet eyed girl somewhat skeptically but kept his own counsel. Davies, who had seen and heard of these feminine warriors before, was quite inclined to believe her.

"And I suppose that you carried the

regulation bottle of poison?" he asked, half jokingly.

Without a word she reached inside her coat and drew forth a tiny silver flask hung on a string around her neck. The smile left Davies' face. He nodded, knowing the purpose of the poison, part of the equipment of every woman belonging to the Battalion of Death.

"How did you happen to enter the Battalion of Death?" he asked.

"Oh," she replied lightly, "my brother, he was fighting and I wanted to fight too. My sister wanted to go with me but she was not strong enough."

"You have other brothers and sisters?"

Natasha and her brother looked up quickly.

"We had," she replied, gently, at last. "My sister was killed by the Bolsheviki, and our father and mother. We are all that is left of a family of five."

"Six," corrected her brother. "Don't forget Feodor."

"Feodor . . . Feodor." She nodded slowly. "But that was so long ago. My oldest brother," she explained, "he forged my father's name to a paper and nearly ruined us; that was years ago, when we were small. He left home and we have never seen him since."

"But how did you get to Siberia?"

"When the Revolution started, Mischa here was wounded near Moscow. I was at the front. I disguised myself as a peasant girl and found him and brought him back to health. Then together we fled to Siberia and joined the Ussuri Cossacks. When Kolchak was defeated we were captured and condemned to be killed. They put us on the death train—a train that they filled with White officers and ran out on a sidetrack, where they poured oil over it and burned up every one. But I promised one of the guards to marry him if he would save my brother and myself. So he saved us and I killed him and we escaped to Chita. At Chita we were captured again. And the Bolshevik commissar condemned us to death saying that I should first be turned over to the soldiers for their amusement. But I talked to the soldiers until they were ashamed to harm me and they helped me to get away and I helped my brother and again we ran away and here we are."

Davies and Duggan had been listening to this remarkable history in astonishment. When she finished, Davies looked at her in admiration.

"Good Lord! You have been through the thick of it!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she agreed quietly, and lighted a cigaret.

"Your oldest brother disappeared, your sister, mother and father killed by the Bolsheviki and your own life endangered time and again! Life has been a little cruel to you."

She looked at him somberly.

"We have a proverb which says, 'The steppes are cruel and heaven is far.' Whether it is the steppes that make the Russians cruel or not, I do not know, but the Russians are full of needless cruelty, all of them, Whites or Reds, cultured and ignorant—they delight in inflicting suffering upon their fellow men—they are all the same."

Davies had observed that her eyes seldom lost their look of brooding sadness.

"What do you fear now?" he asked her.

"What do I not fear?" she asked him gravely. "We have just fled from Chita, narrowly escaping with our lives. Here in Hailar I thought we might be safe for a little but now word has come that the Chinese have entered into an agreement with the Bolsheviki to surrender all the Russian refugees."

"But they have no right!" exclaimed Davies hotly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Right has little to do with it."

"Who is the Chinese military governor here at Hailar?" Davies broke in again.

"Nam Pan," she replied. "They say he is a Leopard."

"A Leopard? Why—what—"

"Sh-sh!" She put her finger warningly to her lips and looked frightened, then went on swiftly, not answering his question. "So you see all these gay officers are liable to be lined up against a wall and

shot very soon. They know this; that is why they sing so loudly. We have not money to get away very far. He—" she nodded at her brother—"wishes to join Baron Wilhelm Ungern at Urga, but me, I fear that man. He is a madman. He has had many of his officers beaten to death with the *tashur* when they displeased him—and Mischa my brother is so gay and careless. Now tonight he has suddenly decided to go back to Chita and kill the commissar who tried to throw me to the soldiers—and that means almost certain death for both of us—for I would not let him go alone. So you can see—" she smiled a sudden brave, rather forlorn smile—"so you see, whichever way I turn I have my back behind me! Mischa, come! It is time we were saying good night to our friends."

She rose.

"Goo'night! Goo'night!"

Mischa wobbled up and waved a very cheerful but somewhat scrambled farewell and was marched away by his sister.

DAVIES' eyes followed them as they made for the door, the tall well built Russian officer and his slim, courageous sister, neat and trim in her Cossack uniform, the light sparkling from the jeweled dagger she carried slung at her belt. At the door she turned suddenly and, finding his eyes upon her, she flashed back a quick, friendly smile that seemed to illumine the whole room. And then she was gone, leaving Davies thoughtful.

"If a guy ain't too blame particular about stayin' alive, this here country is a good place to stick around," commented Duggan.

"It's the border country, and it's also the Alsace-Lorraine of Asia, this Manchuria Mongolia section," Davies remarked absently; then drawing himself up to the table with new decision, "What have we found out today? Let's see, we know that Baron Ungern is at Urga, that he is fighting somebody, we don't know whom, probably the Bolsheviki. We know that the Chinese and the Mongols aren't on friendly terms. And Baron Ungern being at Urga, the Mongol headquarters, he must be lined up with the Mongols against the Chinese. And if the Chinese are agreeing to surrender the Russian White refugees to the Bolsheviki the Chinese must be on friendly terms with the Bolshies. So the lineup is Mongols, Baron Ungern, White Russians against the Chinese and the Bolsheviki. Now the question is, where do the Japanese come in on this? Who are they playing? That's what we've got to find out. We've also got to find out what has become of this mysterious Catron fellow. What he is doing galivanting around dressed up as a member of the Bolsheviki Cheka is something that I can't figure out."

"Yes, sir, that's about the lineup as I figger it. But what I can't get is, who are the Leopards? Or who is the Leopard? Remember old Marimba Champalong or whatever his name was? He told us to be particular careful of the Leopard. Now this little Russian lady all dressed up like a Boy Scout looked scared to death when she mentioned Leopards."

"You've got me. But what we have to figure on is our next move. We've got to get hold of this fellow Catron at all costs. And he is supposed to be in Chita parading around in Bolshevik uniform. Looks like we'd have to go to Chita."

Sergeant Duggan looked glum.

"It ain't so healthy in Chita. Them Bolshies is awful quick about shootin' people full o' holes, then makin' inquiries later. And there ain't no American troops in Siberia no more."

"Yes, but I think we could get through and, by moving carefully, keep out of trouble. I don't see any other way of getting hold of this fellow Catron. Tell you what we'll do. We'll go part of the way on the train, then get off and hire horses and cross the border somewhere away from the railroad. They will be pretty watchful at the railroad. The only thing is that we'll have to look out for Hung-Hutzes. The Manchurian border is pretty well covered with their bands."

"Who are they?"

"Chinese bandits. It is said that Chang-Tso-Lin, the Chinese war lord of Manchuria, used to be a Hung-Hutze. They're bad babies to get captured by. They have a pleasant little habit of impaling their captives—the old Tartar torture."

"How do they do that?"

"They set a sharp stake upright on the ground and seat the poor victim on it. The more he wriggles the deeper in it goes. They suffer horrible agony sometimes for two or three days before they die."

"Good God!"

But Davies was watching two Japanese officers who had just entered and ordered tea and cakes at a nearby table.

"Don't Japs drink anything stronger than tea, Major?"

"Yes, they put away lots of *sake* when they're at home."

"Do they ever get drunk?"

"I've only seen one Japanese drunk. And that was a schoolmate of mine. He was a cadet at the same time I was in the military school. I met him years after in Tokio and he threw a *geisha* party for me —lots of beautiful dancing and lots of weird music and lots of *sake*. He got a good little Japanese edge on before the evening was finished. Dooley, we called him at school. He ended up the evening by trying to teach the *geishas* the Virginia reel. A blame good scout was Dooley. I think he's a major in the Japanese army now." Davies smiled in memory of the scene.

"When do you think we'd better head out, Major?" asked Duggan after a pause.

"First thing in the morning; we'll have to travel light; pistols, some extra ammunition, a little gold, a lot of rubles and a little luck and we ought to make it."

A GRAY haired old Russian with rather bewildered looking eyes came drifting by their table. So forlorn did the old man look that Davies smiled at him. He stopped and bowed. Davies waved him to a seat and offered him a glass of wine which he accepted gratefully. He spoke no English, only Russian and French.

It turned out that he had been a minor official of the Russian telegraph service.

"I suppose the Revolution has made it hard for you?" Davies asked politely.

"The Revolution, a terrible thing!" the old man exclaimed. "They have destroyed religion."

"Do you believe they have destroyed religion in Russia?"

"By the Holy Saints, I do believe it. Russia was a good place when men still believed in God and a second assistant supervisor of the telegraph service was a man of some importance. Now men's souls walk in darkness and I go hungry."

The old fellow sipped his wine sadly, one of the helpless derelicts rooted out of their secure niches by the revolutionary storm, a derelict too old and battered by time to find a new niche wherein to finish up his few remaining years in peace and comfort.

"You have no children?" asked Davies.

"Two I had—fine strong sons. But no more, no more. They escaped the Bolsheviki only to be killed by the Bloody Mad Baron."

"Who is that?" asked Davies.

"Baron Wilhelm Ungern, that thrice cursed idolator. May his bones rot and his soul find eternal torment!"

The old man flushed, his eyes glared, he gripped the edges of the table in a passion of vehement hate.

"How did he happen to be responsible for the death of your sons?" Davies asked, his voice solicitous.

"How? They were officers under him. For some reason he condemned them to death. They were strangled by his executioner, a brute by the name of Seepalov —why, God, who alone knows the workings of a madman's mind, could tell."

"You say he is an idolator?"

"Aye, an idolator, a worshiper of graven images, a follower of the Evil One, a Buddhist."

"He is a Buddhist?"

"Yes, a Buddhist, slaughtering Chris-

tians like cattle. May he die in torment!"

The old man, his eyes full of the helpless anger of old age, rose and walked away with bowed head, too occupied with his wrongs to remember to say a farewell to the two Americans.

"This guy Sternberg, or whatever his name is, seems to be kind of hard boiled," commented Duggan. "Guess we'd be wise to keep away from his neighborhood."

"Must be a queer character," reflected Davies aloud, "a white man turned Buddhist. He evidently hasn't much compunction as to whom he kills or why. Yes, we'll try to stay away from his vicinity."

THEY went to the telegraph office again before turning in. Another telegram awaited Davies.

CATRON REPORTED IN CHITA USE EVERY EFFORT TO SECURE HIM GO TO CHITA IF NECESSARY FIND OUT RELATIONS OF UNGERN WITH CHINESE AND MONGOLIANS ESPECIALLY THE JAPANESE.

Before leaving the telegraph office Davies drafted a report of the information they had already secured and sent it off in cipher to Peking.

CHAPTER III

THE HUNG-HUTZES

THE NEXT morning found them aboard the train headed in the direction of the Manchurian-Siberian border prepared to enter the territory of the Bolsheviki. They held no illusions concerning the danger that lay ahead. The two were silent as the train pulled out of Hailar.

Duggan broke the silence after a time.

"Remember that red headed Russian we mussed up last night, the fellow who was kicking the old Marimba guy when he was down?"

"Yes, what about him?"

"I thought I seen him gettin' on the train just as we went aboard."

Davies looked perturbed.

"I think I'll take a walk through the cars jest to see if I ain't right," and Duggan disappeared.

He returned in fifteen minutes, nodding his head.

"It's either him or his twin brother. He's sittin' back in the last car with a couple rough lookin' chinks or somethin'. I think it's him all right, he's got a bandage on his face and seems kind o' the worse for wear. Do you know that fellow has greenish loookin' eyes, Major?"

Davies looked thoughtful.

"The hell you say! But there are lots of men with greenish looking eyes. What worries me is that he's liable to be a Bolshevik and may denounce us when he gets among his friends. We'll try to slip him when we get off the train this side of the border."

They were running through the open plains of Manchuria. Chinese villages grouped themselves alongside the track. From afar off could be seen the plain stretching away limitlessly to the horizon. An occasional band of mounted men appeared in view, men who watched the train carefully but kept at a safe distance.

"Probably Hung-Hutzes," said Davies studying them.

The train stopped at various small stations. At one of these the two Americans went for a stroll on the platform. Right on the edge of the station was a small encampment of nomads, their *yurtas* looking like black beehives.

Some one on the platform informed the Americans that the nomads were Buriats. Curious, Davies and Duggan walked over the better to observe them. They were seasoned, hardy looking people, their faces polished to the color of mahogany by desert wind and sun. They wore *kalats* of brown and green material, and high pointed foxskin hats with great flaps falling behind to cover the ears. The men were stocky and well built with the slightly bowed legs of the habitual horsemen.

Two of them were dragging a protesting sheep along toward the center of a group

that waited close to the platform. One awaited, holding a knife.

Nearly naked, copper colored children crawled around in the dirt. Women in queer hornlike headdresses were smoking long pipes.

The two dragging the sheep brought it close to where the man waited with the knife. It was a dirty looking animal with a fat stubby tail.

The two threw the sheep on its back. The man with the knife sat on its belly. The Buriats looked on calmly.

What followed was so revolting that the two Americans swore softly to themselves.

For the two assistants held the sheep's head and legs to the ground while the man with the knife cut open the upper part of the sheep's belly and put his hand through the opening. The poor foolish animal began to roll its eyes in agony, while its body squirmed helplessly as the Buriat dragged out the puffy white entrails. The man rummaged around the ribs of the beast, the sheep's guts flapped in short gasps, the body jerked more and more strongly and the sheep gave forth a hoarse gurgling moan. The butcher dragged the heart through the diaphragm, the animal gave a last convulsive throb and its eyes became bright and fixed.

The strange Mongol faces of the Buriats were absolutely calmly indifferent and dispassionate. The men and women looked on incuriously, puffing at their pipes.

It came over Davies that were it a man who was being killed the Mongols would look on in the same indifferent manner. About the cruelty of some races there is something human and comprehensible. But these bright, incurious eyes that looked indifferently through slanting lids at the most horrible suffering—hard, shoe button eyes that stared but did not see!

"Kinda gives me the creeps, the cold blooded way they go about it," confessed Duggan as the two walked back to the train.

Davies nodded in agreement.

They were passing under the windows of the car just in front of their own. Something impelled Davies to look up. He stared straight into a face that seemed familiar although he could not place it for a moment. The person looking down at him was evidently a young Russian peasant. But the eyes gazed at him warningly. Looking more intently he saw that it was the face of the Russian girl he had met the evening before. Sitting next her, and also staring down at him, was her brother attired in Russian peasant costume as well.

They both shook their heads imperceptibly. He went on as if he had seen nothing.

BACK in their own compartment, Davies told Duggan in a low voice of his discovery.

"The damn' pup!" exclaimed Duggan. "Is he draggin' that girl back to certain death? He ought to be given a good wallopin'."

"Yes," Davies agreed uncertainly, "but where else can they go? She is afraid of having her brother join Baron Ungern at Urga, she's afraid if they stay in Manchuria the Chinese will turn them over to the Reds anyway, and they haven't got enough to get away from Manchuria They might be able to hide out among their own people somewhere in Siberia It's a pretty big place."

Duggan grunted in dissatisfaction.

"Besides," continued Davies thoughtfully, "the most audacious move is generally the safest. When in doubt, attack.'

They were slowing down preparatory to entering the last station on the Manchurian side of the border. Like typical Americans they stood up for the last ten minutes before arrival. It was at the forward end of the car that they waited.

The door to the car ahead opened Out came the tall young Russian officer and his sister, dressed as Russian peasants. The girl wore a dark shawl over her head, from beneath which her eyes flashed a friendly greeting at Davies.

The young Russian, after looking past

Davies and on down the car's length, stepped up quickly.

"Be very careful," he said in a low tone, "you are being followed. We found out that the Leopards are after you. Shake off pursuit if possible and meet us at the shop of Lian Shin, the jeweler."

He turned his back as though unaware of the presence of the Americans and the train drew up and came to a stop in the station.

Selecting a carriage from among the crowd of vociferous drivers, they went straight to the hotel, secured rooms and sauntered out into the hallway as though nothing were the matter. Davies found an American, a representative of a big oil company, who knew where the jewelry shop of Lian Shin was located. Getting explicit directions, they strolled forth. Calling a carriage, they drove in the opposite direction until they found an alleyway leading to another street. Through this they made their way swiftly on foot, hailed another carriage and drove up to the jewelry shop. The street was clear behind them; no one could be seen.

THEY entered the shop. A tall thin Chinese in flowing silken robes rose gravely to meet them.

"You are awaited," he stated in a clear voice, and led them back through a court yard, up a stairway to a low ceiled room.

In the dim light they saw the forms of the Russian and his sister.

"I am so glad you arrived; we were frightened," she spoke rapidly and nervously. "Come sit down."

She led them back to a table. The Chinese withdrew. A servant poured tea for them.

"What is it all about anyway?" asked Davies.

"We don't know," she answered. "Have you in some way offended the Leopards?"

"Just who are the Leopards?" Davies queried.

Brother and sister glanced swiftly around.

"No one knows," she spoke in a low tone. "It is a secret society. It is very powerful. They have slain many, many people. Who they are or what their objects are no one seems to know who is not a member. I know that there are Chinese in it, there are some Mongols, and shame be it to say, some Russians. We saw you leave your hotel this morning. As soon as you had climbed into your carriage we saw Gau Din-Shan, a Chinese, who is known to be a Leopard, follow you out of the hotel, and drive after you in another carriage. We saw him take the next compartment in the train to yours. He got off here and followed after you to your hotel. We thought it best to warn you for they strike like snakes, very swiftly and suddenly."

Davies listened to this recital gravely.

"I can't figure out how we incurred the enmity of this outfit," he said to Sergeant Duggan. "What have we done to be marked for slaughter at the hands of these pestiferous Leopards?"

"Dunno, lessen it was gettin' mixed up with the old Marimba. We sure pasted a couple strange guys pretty severe, specially that red bearded Santa Claus."

"Who was he?" asked Natasha swiftly.

"A tall, rough lookin' Roosian, with lots o' red whiskers."

Brother and sister looked at each other startled.

"A Russian? Tall? Red bearded?" they repeated together.

"Yeh, happen to know anybody like that?" Duggan asked easily.

"We do. If it is the one we think it is you had better not try to get into Siberia, if that is your intention," she said after a pause, her voice serious and worried.

"Well, that is our intention, red beard or no red beard," Davies informed them.

"Please do not try," she almost pleaded. He is terribly dangerous. Your life will not be worth *that!*" She snapped her fingers.

"And you are a good one to give advice," smiled Davies, "for you two are, I suppose, going back to the place from which you escaped in order to chastise the man who—"

"In order to kill the red bearded man," spoke up the brother, his eyes flashing.

"Well, that's too bad; you missed your chance today, for he was right on the train, about four cars behind your car."

"In God's name! You are telling us the truth?" the brother rose, his face pale.

"Absolutely."

"He got off here?"

The brother tugged at something concealed in his belt, and paced toward the door.

"I don't think so," Duggan spoke up. "As we got off the train I saw him out of the tail of my eye. He was on the platform of his car, without any cap on, his hands in his pockets, looking at the crowd, as though he'd never had no intention of ever leaving the train."

"Then he has gone on to Chita—" the girl's voice was tragic in its disappointment—"and we must follow him. Oh, Mischa, let's give up this mad thing. What matters it? We will simply be arrested again and this time we cannot hope to escape."

"I don't want you to come," Mischa said impatiently. "I told you to remain behind, but I am going through and kill him if it is the last thing I ever do on this earth!"

She shrugged her shoulders in the fatalistic way common to Russians.

"I will not allow you to go alone," she said quietly, then, her voice all practical again. "We must make arrangements to get started. Lian Shin can arrange matters for us."

She said something to her brother in Russian. He demurred; she pressed her point; finally he acceded. She turned to Davies again.

"We probably none of us will come out of this alive, therefore I suggest that we go forward and die together," she stated as calmly as though going forward to certain death was a matter of little importance. "You see, in case of a fight there are four of us, and four are twice as strong as two."

"Mademoiselle, your arithmetic is flawless." Davies smiled at her. "I hope that your prophecies of certain death are not as flawless. By all means let's go together; how do we get there?"

She said something in Chinese to the servant. He disappeared to return with the tall, grave mannered Lian Shin. The girl talked to him in Chinese. He shook his head. Again she spoke rapidly and authoritatively. The Chinese finally nodded, shrugging his shoulders as if to say, "Upon your heads be the blame". Then followed rapid volleying question and answer which ended up by Lian Shin agreeing to everything and departing. Outside they could hear his voice raised in the courtyard.

Davies smiled at her, so earnest and flushed was her face and so authoritative her bearing.

"Well, Ataman," he asked, "what is the program?" using the title that belongs to the chief of a Cossack organization.

She bit her lip, and replied gravely.

"I do not intend to be—how do you say?—domineering, but I speak Chinese as I do Russian and you should not jest with me because I try to help."

"You mistake me, mademoiselle," Davies returned. "I do not jest. I was trying in my clumsy fashion to express my admiration."

"I am sorry," she said quickly. "You must forgive me if I am nervous and sensitive. I have been under so much strain for so long a while. But," she went on, "Lian Shin has arranged everything. The horses will be here after dark. He has a guide for us who will take us four or five versts to the east of here where we can cross the border. That will be the most difficult matter. Once we are across we can trade the horses as they become tired and get back to the railroad again on the Siberian side. There are many small stations where we can board the train unobserved and travel into Chita. Once there we are in God's hands."

"Excellent," agreed Davies. Then, very practically, "Now you must allow me to know the expenses of this journey so that I can reimburse the Chinese for his trouble."

"That is all arranged," she replied. "I am to give him my ring, this one."

She showed them a narrow circlet of gold with a large ruby in it.

"But that is unthinkable. My—employers—allow me very much money for expenses. Please allow me to settle the bill."

Both demurred at this, but on Davies' insistence and the reiterated statement that it was not he but his wealthy employers who would pay the bill, they finally gave in.

It was thought wiser for the Americans not to return to the hotel, but to wait behind the jewel shop in hiding until night came and with it the horses which were to carry them out of town and away to the border.

"With any luck," Davies said to Duggan, "we should be across the border and back to the railroad in four or five hours' travel."

"Yes, sir, with any luck," Duggan was dubious. "How about these here Hung-what-do-call-'ems, these here Chinese bandits?"

"Have to take a chance on them. I don't imagine they are very bold so near the railroad. You both are armed are you not?" he asked the Russians.

"We each have a revolver."

"Good! That makes four. How about ammunition?"

It was well that he asked. For typical of Europeans, who esteem the pistol somewhat lightly, the two only carried five rounds apiece, one load for their weapons. The Chinese was called and finally supplied them with extra ammunition, for which he sent forth into the town. Davies and Duggan were each supplied with three partially loaded magazines. But they each had, in addition, fifty rounds in reserve, tucked away in the pockets of their loose coats.

A SILK lined copper lantern cast a reddish glow over the horses in the courtyard, spreading weird shadows against the walls, outlining the small, Mongol ponies grotesquely against the gloom of the buildings. Among them there stepped softly a broad, squat Chinese clad in sheepskin coat, their guide.

Mounting into the cloth covered saddles, they filed out of a small portal in the rear and entered an alleyway. Following their guide, they passed quietly through several side streets until they came out into open country at the edge of town.

The night was dark and starless. They could scarcely see a yard on either side of the track they followed. The guide put his horse into a canter and the four followed suit, hitting the stride that the Mongol pony can keep for hour after hour without strain or fatigue. The chill of the Manchurian night settled about them, a cold wind blew across the plains. They rode for the most part in silence, Davies staring into the darkness as he rode by the side of the silent Chinese, who sat hunched in his sheepskin jacket like some squat bodied gnome.

Behind them they were leaving the great spaces of Mongolia. Ahead of them were the enormous stretches of the Manchurian plain. To their left, the Siberian border lay distant a mile or more as they rode parallel to its course. Beyond that border lay, none knew what, of bloodshed and death and pain past all computing.

Their ponies' unshod feet pattered suddenly on a causeway and they found themselves in the street of a silent and darkened village with no sign of life except a band of lean and wolfish curs that snapped at their horses' heels as they rode through.

Again they were in open country, the wind blowing steadily in their faces. So keen and cold was this wind of the open plains that Davies found his eyes watering from its vigor and was forced to lower his head against its attack.

It was only when the pony of the Chinese, riding alongside, suddenly swerved against his leg, that he looked up.

The road seemed filled with squat, mounted figures, looming up silently in the darkness like black figments of a dimly remembered nightmare.

A hand suddenly seized his bridle. Freeing his foot from the stirrup, Davies kicked out silently and viciously. The man on the ground fell backward. A shot hurtled past Davies' ear.

His pistol had leaped from its holster. With a shout he drove straight at the crush of men before him, his pistol roaring and spitting out angry spurts of flame. Behind him he heard the crack of the light revolvers carried by the two Russians, followed by the heavier crash of Duggan's automatic.

An audacious attack is often the best defense. The somber figures scattered before them like chaff before a blast of wind. The four galloped into the darkness. Their guide had disappeared—probably shot or captured, Davies reasoned swiftly.

Behind them the night became hideous with shouts and inhuman yells. Gazing backward, Davies could see vicious tongues of flame stabbing the darkness as the rifles of their antagonists blazed after them. The occasional high keening whine of a bullet overhead showed that the aim was high as is usual when men are excited. A steady rattle of horses' hoofs told that they were still being pursued.

Looking to his left, Davies made out the smaller figure of Natasha riding silently by his side, her head bent low on her horse's neck.

"Are you hurt?" he gasped.

"No, are you?"

"Fit as a fiddle," he laughed in relief. "Who are the men who attacked us?"

"Hung-Hutzes," she replied.

"Where is our guide?" He had to raise his voice to make himself understood against the wind and the noise of their progress.

"I think he is captured," she answered.

"Do you know this country around here?"

"Yes, a little. There is a half ruined watch tower where we might shelter until morning. It should be around here somewhere on a small hill."

The two strained their eyes through the gloom. Behind them they could hear the shouts of their pursuers and the occasional crack of a rifle.

"I see it!" she called, and bore away to the left.

NOT UNTIL they had gone fifty yards more did Davies see a shadow looming against the lighter darkness of the sky. It was almost over them, a high tower somewhat like a windmill.

Following where she rode, he felt his horse labor at a hill. Up they went until he saw a gate directly in front of them. Riding through this, he jumped off his horse, looping the reins through his arm. Clattering directly behind him came Duggan and the young Russian.

"Tie the horses, Duggan!" he called. "I'll hold the gate."

Watching and listening in the darkness, Davies felt, rather than heard or saw, the approach of the enemy, dim figures moving rapidly toward him from below.

Dropping his arm, he aimed quietly and squeezed his pistol until it seemed to go off of its own volition. The foremost horse reared and fell. Taking as careful aim again, he saw another horse flounder on the road. The roar of another automatic pistol fell on his ears. It was Duggan. The two men, trained for years to the pistol, fired as steadily and carefully as if on the target range qualifying as pistol experts.

The dim figures on the road below swept backward out of sight.

"Look out, Major!"

Duggan's heavy arm swept Davies backward not a second too soon from the narrow gateway, for directly behind where he had been standing against the side of the gate a bullet smacked sharply against the stone and ricocheted high into the air.

It was the advance guard of a volley which pinged and whined around them and above them.

"Got to close this gate some way!" Davies grunted and tugged at the heavy iron studded gate, which stuck stubbornly on its ancient hinges.

With Duggan aiding, the strength of both men slowly shoved the stout piece of wood and metal into place. A strong bar was dropped into its fastening.

The bullets continued to rattle against the tower.

A voice came out of the darkness behind them. It was Natasha, revolver in hand, whom they saw when they turned.

"My brother is guarding the rear. I went through to see if there was any way they could get in beside this gate. There is no place except a window much higher from the ground than a man."

Davies flashed his pocket light around him. They were standing in the embrasure made by the gate posts.

A small covered courtyard, in which Duggan had tied the horses, was directly in rear. A steep and narrow flight of steps led to the floor above.

The firing from outside had died. In the silence Davies listened intently.

"I think I hear some movement from out there," he whispered. "There must be a loophole directly above this gate. You watch here, Duggan. I'll go up and see."

He sped up the narrow stairs, two steps at a time.

Flashing his light on the floor as he reached the top of the stairs, he followed up its beam until he saw the Russian standing guard at a small window in the rear. The upper room was intended for defense and was liberally supplied with loopholes. As he had reasoned, there was not only an embrasure above the gate but the tower jutted out above the lower entrance.

In the floor was a square hole which was directly above the outside of the gate. Peering out this, he saw nothing at first. Something aroused his attention below. He got down on his knees and watched through the square hole in the floor. The entrance below was in dark shadow. Did the shadow stir or not? He strained his eyes but could not see anything.

Steadying his pistol on the edge of the aperture, he suddenly flashed his light below. An evil face stared up at him, the cruel Mongol eyes showing no fear. The man had put some small object at the foot of the gate.

Davies fired. The roar of his gun filled the narrow tower room. Snapping on the electric torch again, he saw a huddled figure prone on the ground, its arms encircling the small object in a last embrace.

Shrieks and yells rose from the approach to the tower, not twenty yards away. The beam of the pocket lamp sent out into the night showed Davies a huddled group of figures on foot, massed ready for a rush. He fired steadily into them, snapping out an empty clip and reloading with his last filled magazine. In the dim light of his electric torch, he saw the group scatter and run, leaving three prone figures on the ground.

He felt a soft shoulder against his; he heard Natasha's voice in the darkness.

"How you can shoot!" she exclaimed, a thrill in her voice. Then her tone became practical. "Now we must eat. They will not dare to attack again until daylight."

"Eat? Where are we going to get anything to eat?" Davies asked in surprise.

"Oh, you men," she laughed, "you are like a lot of children. I brought food, of course, a whole satchel of food, and two bottles of water tied to my saddle. If you will make a fire I will have some tea for you."

He could hear her going toward the stairs in the darkness.

Davies followed. He found the courtyard deep in *kiao-lang* stalks. With these and the aid of some dried dung, he built a fire. She provided a small copper kettle.

WITH the Russian officer on guard above, they sat very cozily by the refreshing warmth of the small fire and drank hot tea and ate black bread and meat, topping it off with cigarets all around.

"Not so bad, not so bad," Duggan's voice sounded contented and a little sleepy.

The horses were munching on the dried

grasses and *kiao-lang* stalks. The fire cast its glow over the three as they sat there. Davies was inclined to agree, but kept a sharp ear nevertheless.

"Now," he said, tossing away his cigaret stub, "we'll have to make arrangements for the guard for the night. I'll go on immediately, for two hours. Duggan, you can relieve me, and Mischa can relieve you."

"And where do I enter into this guard duty?" asked the girl, surprised.

"You must rest. I'll fix you up a comfortable bed with the saddle blankets and some of this straw."

"You forget that I am a soldier too." She spoke a little haughtily. "I would feel humiliated to leave my share of guard duty to others."

"Have it your own way."

Davies, being a military man, naturally loved peace at any price and knew that the road to peace seldom runs in the direction of arguments with women. At the same time, he and Duggan each made a private resolve to be up and about when her tour of duty came on.

And thus it was arranged. Mischa was relieved from his post in the room above and had his supper while Davies mounted guard.

From the loopholes he could hear or see no sign of the enemy. Flashing his light down through the hole above the gate, he saw the huddled figure of the Hung-Hutze still grasping the small box. It was probably an explosive charge. A sudden idea came to him. Why not? He hurried down the steps.

"Help me open the gate," he called to Duggan.

The two worked at the cumbrous affair, finally dragging it open far enough to allow Davies to squeeze through.

Stooping low, he reached down and picked up the small box, handing it to Duggan. Reaching down he felt of the dead bandit and found on him a belt well filled with rifle cartridges. This he handed to Duggan as well. Listening there in the darkness in front of the gate, he could hear nothing.

"I'm going on a little reconnoitering expedition," he whispered. "You hold the gate and watch for my return."

Pistol in hand, he slipped forward into the gloom. He had not gone more than ten paces when he heard a slight movement behind him.

Poising, alert, his pistol ready, he waited. The movement came closer. He could discern a dim shape in the darkness.

"It is I," came a whisper in Natasha's voice. She crept up, her revolver in her hand. "You should not go alone." She calmly moved out at his side.

It being neither the time nor the place to argue, Davies accepted Natasha's reinforcement with what grace he could muster. They reached the bottom of the small hill without sighting anything but, pausing to listen, they heard the murmur of voices on ahead. The sound seemed to come from the far side of the main road.

They started to move toward it.

Suddenly they both stopped and crouched on the ground.

NOT TEN yards away a match had flared up in the darkness. In its tiny gleam of light they saw the dark Mongol face of a Hung-Hutze, his high cheekbones and slant eyes showing up with startling clearness as he lighted a small pipe. The match went out. The lighted pipe made a small glow in the darkness. They could see nothing else. Natasha quickly seized Davies' hand, giving it a firm pressure and pushing it back as if to warn him to remain quiet. She disappeared.

Davies was annoyed. If he went forward he might imperil her life. The best thing was to remain quiet until she returned. He could not hear a sound except the murmur of voices beyond the road. The tiny gleam of light still showed from the pipe of the Hung-Hutze sentinel. Davies watched its glow.

Suddenly the glow of light disappeared only to reappear suddenly in the form of a shower of sparks on the ground. There was a dull bump from the direction of the sparks. Then all was silent again.

From so near him that he started with the suddenness of it he heard Natasha's whisper again.

"I have killed him," she said.

"Good Lord!" he snorted, then reflected swiftly that the way was probably clear to the main body of the enemy. He moved forward again, Natasha following him closely. The road was crossed without incident. They could hear the voices more plainly. The murmur seemed to come from behind a small hillock which rose above them on the far side of the road.

Making their way cautiously up this the two arrived at the top, seeing below them the gleam of a small camp-fire. Around it were disposed the forms of eight or ten Hung-Hutzes, most of them smoking their small Chinese pipes. Some were asleep. Behind them the horses were tethered, busy foraging for what little grass could be found. The flame of the fire rose and fell, lighting up the scene in flashes and again leaving it dimmed.

The Hung-Hutzes would occasionally turn and stare quietly at something out of the range of the firelight. Following the direction of their gaze, Davies could make out some object of curious shape. It looked not unlike a grotesque enlargement of a child's Jumping Jack on a stick. No sound came from it but it weaved and writhed slowly. One of the Hung-Hutzes put a fresh supply of fuel on the fire. The dry grass blazed, lighting up the whole scene clearly.

That sudden blaze of light etched on Davies' memory a picture which he could never forget. The circle of dark faced bandits, shaggy in their sheepskin coats and fur hats, looking on indifferently, with something inhuman and incomprehensible in their bright, incurious stares, gazing through slanting lids with hard, shoe button eyes that looked, but did not seem to see, the horrible suffering of the naked man impaled on the stake near them.

It was the Chinese guide who had led Davies and his party from the town.

Davies swore softly and fingered his pistol. But a better idea came to him. Pulling Natasha back he dropped quietly down the small hillock. The two cautiously made their way past the body of the sentinel, from which Davies picked the rifle; hurrying across the road they climbed the hill and announced their coming to Duggan at the gate with a low whistle.

"God! I was beginning to get worried, Major. That there girl slipped outa here after you before I could say boo. I sure thought you was both killed by now."

Telling Duggan briefly of their experiences, Davies asked for the wooden box he had retrieved from the dead Hung-Hutze at the gate.

Examining it, he found it to be filled with a heavy charge of powder, which had attached to it a length of fuse.

"We've got to make a first class bomb out of this," Davies said, and the two started to work, after seeing the gate closed and putting the young Russian on guard again at the loopholes above.

Among the litter of the courtyard they found various odds and ends of scrap metal. With the aid of these and the stout small box, they contrived a rough bomb, cutting the fuse to a short length and attaching it carefully after having tested a piece of it to determine at what speed it consumed itself, once lighted.

It took them nearly half an hour to do this. When it was finally completed, they prepared to sally forth.

Natasha appeared from nowhere ready to set out with them.

"No," Davies said decidedly, "this time you stay on guard," and Natasha, after starting to open her mouth in protest, looked at Davies' businesslike profile as it bent over the bomb, and agreed.

AGAIN Davies went forth, this time followed by Duggan. The chief thing that worried them was that the sentinel's death might have been discovered by now and new precautions taken.

But after crossing the road they found nothing, only heard as formerly the hum

of voices and saw an occasional spark from the bandits' fire. Silently they crept to the brow of the small hillock.

Duggan swore softly as he saw the writhing body of their Chinese guide curled grotesquely around the top of the sharpened stake. The bandits sat around the fire drinking tea, laughing and talking among themselves.

It was time to break up the party. Davies, holding the bomb below the crest of the hill, lighted a match to it. The fuse caught and slowly burned toward the box and the charge within. Holding it carefully, the flame concealed in his cupped hand, he rose slowly to full height.

Duggan watched him fearfully. The fuse burned nearer and nearer the box.

Duggan held his breath and involuntarily screened his eyes. Would the major never throw the thing! Just when it seemed that they were all to be blown to pieces, Davies heaved it forward, landing it fairly and squarely in the middle of the fire among the bandits.

The Hung-Hutze looked up stupidly, then started to rise.

The silence was suddenly split by a roar as the bomb exploded.

Davies and Duggan ducked as they heard splinters hurtle past them. Looking down into the camp, they saw a pall of dust and smoke over the place where the fire had been. Shrieks and groans were coming out of it. From the cloud one or two stumbling figures issued, making toward their horses. Duggan picked one of these off with his pistol, the other he missed and the fellow mounted up and galloped away.

The two Americans made their way down the hill. The bomb had wreaked terrible havoc. One of the bandits had his head nearly severed from his body. Others were killed, seemingly without a scratch. Still others moaned and stirred, mortally wounded.

Natasha's voice called exultingly from the hill above. In a second she was down among them.

They missed her for a moment as they examined the damage done by the bomb.

A revolver shot from nearby startled them. They looked up. She was walking from the stake. The body on the stake no longer writhed. She came up, white and shaken.

"It was the only merciful thing," she said, and they nodded in silent agreement.

"Well, we'd better make tracks out of here while the going is good!" Davies snapped. "Those people are liable to be back with reinforcements. Get three more rifles and all the ammunition we can carry."

Securing the guns and several belts of ammunition, they made their way back to the tower again where the young Russian awaited their coming in a fever of anxiety, not daring to leave the place unprotected and not knowing what had happened.

They examined the rifles. They were short barreled affairs, most remarkably dirty.

"Why, these are Russian cavalry carbines," shouted Mischa, "and this is Russian ammunition!"

"Probably stole or bought it from the Bolsheviki," commented Davies.

THEY mounted and rode out of the tower.

It was well past midnight now. They decided it was best to make for the border immediately and not run any more risks from the Hung-Hutze. A few stars showed in the sky. From these and from the direction of the road and what Natasha remembered of the way, they set a course to take them northward.

The next difficulty would be in getting past the Red guards on the border. Deciding to fight their way through if other means failed, they rode along, all silent, thinking of the scenes they had just been through. Davies watched Natasha anxiously; she leaned forward on her horse as if in great weariness. But when he asked her, she straightened up proudly and thereafter kept upright in her saddle.

After riding at a canter for at least a mile, they slowed down to verify their

direction. It was while they halted that Duggan, listening, called a sharp warning to be silent.

They all listened. Davies could hear nothing. He dismounted and put his ears to the ground.

"There are a lot of horses galloping somewhere near," he informed them. "We'd better be going."

Mounting up, they plied whip and moved out again, keeping a sharp lookout to front and flank. Their way led them up a narrow track which wound along the side of a hill. The way became steeper. To their right the hill rose almost sheer above them. To their left it dropped away suddenly, too steep to be negotiated by horses.

The place worried Davies somewhat. It was a bad situation in which to be trapped. He hurried his horse as fast as possible up the steep road.

Suddenly he felt the animal stiffen under him. He saw it raise its head. Before he could stop it, it sent out a loud whinney.

The whinney was answered ahead and above them. They heard a shout.

Davies called in a low tone—

"Turn around and head down the road as fast as possible."

Without a word, the little cavalcade started to retrace its steps. A shot was fired from up the hill; it was followed by another and then a scattering volley. They started to gallop. Davies was bringing up the rear, pistol drawn.

Suddenly his horse ran into the horse in front, Duggan's animal.

"What's the matter?" Davies called.

"There's some people comin' up the road." Duggan pointed down where the narrow track wound below them. "I seen the flash of a rifle."

As Davies watched he saw another flash and heard the whirr of a bullet overhead. The people in the rear were almost upon them.

"Come on!" shouted Davies and, dismounting, pointed off the road and up the hill to the right.

They heaved and dragged at the little ponies, finally getting them up and off the road by almost superhuman efforts. A narrow shelf afforded them a precarious footing.

They were none too soon, for on the road below them there was the noise of the trample of hoofs and shouting. Peering down in the darkness, they saw a regular torrent of horsemen pouring down the narrow trail.

Far down the road they could hear shooting and yelling as though a running fight were being carried on. The horsemen below them continued to gallop past in an unending stream.

Suddenly Davies heard a sharp cry and the noise of some one falling near him on the ledge.

"What is it?" he called.

Natasha's voice near him answered in fear—

"My brother, he has slipped and fallen down with his horse to the road."

A commotion took place below them. Suddenly dark figures swarmed all about them.

Davies went down striking and kicking, but overborne by sheer weight. He heard Natasha cry out once, then felt himself being bound and dragged down the hill to the road.

In the darkness he felt the looming presence of many men around him. A light was struck. In its glare he saw the faces of many bandits, their shaggy hats almost covering their faces, while they stared at their captives.

Natasha, bound and held by two of the bandits, was near him. Farther away was Duggan, cursing like a mule skinner while Mischa the young Russian, sat on the ground nursing his shoulder.

One of their captors, who seemed to be in command, gave some orders in a guttural tone.

They were at once shoved and lifted back on to their horses. The stream of men pouring down the hill seemed to have come to an end. Far away they could hear an occasional shot. Who had been fighting or what it was all about Davies did not know.

CHAPTER IV

A JAPANESE SCHOOLBOY

THEY were led up the hill, their captors moving them at a walk. One man was detailed to each prisoner. Davies worked at his bonds but could not force the skilfully tied thongs apart.

Settling into the saddle, he could do nothing but resign himself to whatever fate was in store for them. Then memory of the poor devil of a Chinese guide returned to him. It made him sit up straight and begin to figure ways and means of getting out of this quandary.

"Natasha!" he called back.

A dirty fist was suddenly shoved none too gently in his mouth, but he heard her voice answering, unperturbed.

They rode for about an hour. Topping the hill, they descended to the far side and were now on level ground once more. As far as Davies could judge they were entering some sort of village. They did not pause here; their captors went on with them.

Just about the time that Davies' arms had lost all feeling from the severity with which he had been bound, they came to a gateway and entered a courtyard of what seemed to be a Chinese *fang-tsu*, or house, probably the dwelling of a well to do Chinese farmer. They were lifted off the horses and half dragged and half carried to an outhouse.

The door was opened and they were shoved into the darkness. Davies fell to his knees with the force of the shove administered to him. But they seemed to have fallen on a threshing floor, for the place was filled with straw.

"Is everybody all right?" Davies called in the darkness.

"Yeah," growled Duggan's voice uncertainly and the reassuring word was echoed by Natasha and her brother.

"Did they search you, Major?" asked Duggan.

"No, I've still got my pistol and ammunition; they took away the carbine."

"Same here. If I could only get my arms worked loose we could give 'em a run for their money."

But as they spoke they heard voices outside. The door was opened.

Standing in the opening, the light of several torches illumining him, stood a tall, strongly built Chinese, evidently a Manchu.

He entered with several of the bandits and growled out an order. His men searched the prisoners rapidly, taking away their arms and ammunition and the dagger that Natasha carried.

The Chinese felt of Natasha, as he might feel of a bullock strung up in the market place. As his hand went over her shoulders and breast, he rose with a sharp cry and glared angrily at her, meanwhile nursing his wounded hand. She had bitten him viciously so that the blood poured from his palm.

He said something in a sharp tone to his men. They nodded.

One of them interposed some objection. The tall Manchu growled something in return, looking uncertainly at the prisoners.

Finally, after throwing an order to the men, he left.

The bandits cut the ropes that tied the four and went out, leaving the place in darkness again.

"Thank heavens they didn't steal our cigarets," spoke up Duggan, and unsteadily lit a cigaret.

"Did you notice that these bandits carried Japanese carbines?" asked the Russian officer.

"That's funny," remarked Davies. Then to Natasha, "What were they talking about when that big fellow grew so angry?"

"Oh," she said calmly, "he wanted to have you men killed immediately. Me he wanted for himself. But the others warned him that some one else was coming, evidently a higher leader, and that the higher leader would be very angry. So he said that he would have us killed in the morning if the leader didn't come."

"Well," Duggan remarked philosophically, "here's hoping that the main squeeze

don't have no motor trouble. Me I'd like to struggle along awhile through this vale of tears."

Davies, rubbing his numbed arms, had at last succeeded in restoring the circulation. He rose and started to explore. The door was heavy and solid and gave not a hair's breadth to his efforts. Outside he could hear the voices of men talking, evidently the sentinels. There were no windows in the building. He returned after ten or fifteen minutes and sat disconsolately in his place again.

Soon he heard Duggan's unhurried snoring. Near him he heard Natasha's regular breathing. The young Russian officer had dropped off to sleep while talking.

Overcome with weariness, Davies slipped into a deep and dreamless slumber.

HE WAS awakened by the opening of the door which flooded the place with daylight. Natasha was up on her knees, womanlike, combing her hair. Duggan was rubbing his eyes. The young Russian was still asleep, but awakened as the bandits came in.

The tall Manchu entered. He was talking to his men.

"What does he say?" Davies asked Natasha.

"The higher leader did not come. He is going to kill you three and keep me," she replied, still combing her hair. But as she worked with the comb, Davies noticed her reach into her coat and loosen the tiny flask of silver that hung there.

There was little time for speculation. They were seized and their hands bound behind them.

The strong arms of the bandits raised them and dragged them out into the courtyard. Two of them held Natasha. She stood calmly. Davies, Duggan and Mischa were led across the courtyard. The place was full of bandits, who looked up at them indifferently.

They were crowded against the wall. Near at hand a huge bandit, his arms bare, was polishing a long sword, rubbing it and working away at the broad blade. Davies had seen those Chinese executioners' swords before.

The man stopped his work a moment to look them over, a speculative, indifferent look in his eyes. It was very much the look a butcher might give to the animal he was about to slaughter.

The tall Manchu spoke sharply to the executioner who was still busy polishing his blade. The man replied in a respectful but perfectly decided tone. Davies had heard that tone used before by perfect craftsmen who knew their business and allowed no one to dictate to them as to how they should perform their tasks. He continued to grind and polish. The tall Manchu fumed, waiting with what patience he could muster.

At last the executioner ended his labors. He lifted up the blade in both hands, and swung it once or twice as a baseball player might try out a bat. Then, tucking up his long robe carefully, he approached the prisoners.

Looking them over impersonally, he pointed at the Russian officer. Evidently he was to be the first to go.

The young Russian suddenly began to struggle as they laid hands on him. Several men came up to help subdue him. Duggan and Davies crowded toward the struggle.

Finally the Russian went down, a pack of them on his chest. They slowly untangled themselves. Mischa was forced to his knees. The executioner, who had been watching the struggle without the slightest flicker of emotion lifted his sword and stepped over . . .

THERE was a shout from the gate way. A long yellow car had rolled up unnoticed in the excitement. A very angry looking man in whipcord breeches and sheepskin coat came running across the courtyard, shouting something.

"Dooley!" yelled Davies.

The new arrival stopped as if shot.

"Bingo," he yelled, "what the hell are you doing here?" and rushed over, throwing his arms around Davies.

Suddenly he noticed the bonds; turning

swiftly, he shouted to the men in the yard. Willing hands cut the ropes.

The newcomer, a Japanese in spite of his Chinese associates, shot a series of questions at the men. The tall Manchu stood alone as though turned to stone. The men answered the Japanese, pointing at the tall Manchu.

The new arrival gave some quick order. Four or five men immediately seized the Manchu and bound him. The tall executioner nodded. Picking up his sword with a professionally weary air, he followed as the Manchu was led out of the courtyard.

"I'll fix that bird so that he won't disobey any more orders," stated the Japanese simply.

Davies turned to his friends.

"This is Dooley, my old schoolmate," he introduced him. "By the Lord Harry, Dooley, you got here just about in time. Another few seconds and we would have looked very silly lying around here without any heads to speak of or with."

The Japanese shook his head.

"I'm damn' sorry my men treated you so roughly," he said very apologetically, "but come, we'll forget it and have some chow—Good Lord, I'm glad to see you, Bingo, old boy." He threw an affectionate arm around Davies' shoulders and they all went into the farmhouse.

A FEW quick orders from the Japanese who was evidently a person to be feared and respected, and hot tea with cakes and rice and meat were forthcoming, as well as a heady bottle of some sort of Chinese brandy which was possessed of undoubted authority and potency.

"Last time I saw you, Bingo, I was a little stewed." Dooley had the grace to look sheepish.

"A little!" Davies grinned. "You were pie eyed and trying to teach the *geisha* the Virginia reel. Then you proposed a game of stud poker and all the girls were sitting around nearly bursting with laughter while you tried to teach them."

"I haven't had a good game of stud since I left America," Dooley said regretfully.

"But look here, Dooley, don't answer any questions you don't want to. I'm a secretive fellow bent on gathering all the information I can for my country, I'll warn you beforehand, but I'm damned if I can figure out what a Japanese nobleman who was a major on the Imperial General Staff last time I saw him, is doing up here commanding bandits."

"They're not bandits." Dooley shook his head, then grinned wickedly. "They are irregular cavalry!"

"Irregular is right, about the most irregular cavalry I ever saw," and Davies told him about the fight with the bandits the night before at the watch tower.

Dooley listened carefully.

"They were not my men," he stated when Davies finished. "In the first place they couldn't be my men if they carried Russian carbines, and in the second place, I had a report on that fight of yours. Do you know who you cleaned up on?"

"No."

"A choice detachment of a choice band of thugs called the Leopards. I had a gang of them beheaded this morning. That's why I was almost too late getting here."

"But who are these infernal Leopards? They sound like something out of a dime novel." Davies' face became keen with interest.

Dooley shook his head.

"Who they are no one seems to know. They're some sort of a secret society. I've killed a lot of them but more seem to come. I'd like to find out where their headquarters are and who are their leaders."

"You and I both, old-timer!" Davies told him of his experiences being followed by the Leopards.

"You seem to be somewhat on the same job I am, Bingo. I'm finding out all I can," Dooley remarked seriously.

"Do you mind if I mention about you up here, running these cutthroat squadrons of bold bad bandits?"

"No, shoot. I'll admit—" Dooley

grinned—"that some of them were Hung-Hutzes just a few weeks ago, but having come under my civilizing sway they are very excellent irregular cavalry now. Occasionally I weed out one who seems set upon the error of his ways, like the pleasant old bird who tried to have you sliced up this morning."

"Yes, I'll say that when you eliminate them they stay eliminated if that's any sample of your methods. But listen here, I've got to be on my way. I'm going to Chita."

Dooley's face fell.

"Oh, I say, come off that. You've got to stay here for a while. I'll get in some drinks and we'll have a good, old fashioned, bang-up party."

"Can't do it, Dooley, old horse, I'm on special duty, and you know what that means. I've lost too much time as it is."

Dooley nodded, then a sudden idea came to him.

"But Chita, of all places! They've got a madman up there for a commissar. He's killing people right and left. He'll line you up against a wall and shoot you full of holes before you can say 'how d'you do'."

One of the men came in and waited respectfully until he was noticed. He had a slip of paper in his hand. Dooley finally spoke to him and took the paper.

"Pardon me a second. This is a wireless from Urga and it may be important."

He read the message, scribbled something in his notebook, handed it to the man and dismissed the matter from his mind. But it was not to be so easily dismissed.

"How come you get wireless messages from the middle of Mongolia?" asked Davies.

"Oh, this fellow, Baron Ungern, is very modern. He has put in a wireless station there and a lighting plant and everything."

"What sort of a bird is he?" asked Davies.

Dooley shrugged his shoulders.

"Temperamental as hell, but a pretty good soldier. He certainly has put the fear of God into his men."

It was on the tip of Davies' tongue to ask what the relations of the Japanese were with the "Bloody Mad Baron" but then he felt it would be exceeding the bounds of friendship and kept silent.

"This wireless I just received from one of my men down there states that Baron Ungern has just cleaned up on about fifteen thousand Chinese in a pitched battle at Marmachen on the banks of the Tola River. Yes, he's a good soldier; it is rather a sad commentary on our profession that a man can be a good soldier and still be a human fiend." Dooley frowned as if at some unpleasant memory, then shook off his mood.

"But if you are determined to commit suicide by going to Chita, I can't stop you. Can't you put it off until tomorrow?"

"Not an hour," Davies was firm.

"Well, so be it. I can help you get across the border. Once over there I can do little for you. But wait a minute. I'm going to send one of my men with you. He's a clever mutt and he'll help you."

"Good enough," agreed Davies.

DAVIES reached in his pocket and brought forth the small box carved out of the single amethyst, the present from the old Maramba.

"Maybe you can tell me what this is?" he asked.

Dooley's eyes opened wide as he saw it.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Let's see that."

He turned it over in his hand.

"I'm not asking you any questions, but you are in luck. Why in blazes didn't you let my men have a sniff of this? They would have crawled all over the ground for you!"

"I didn't know it was so blame potent as all that."

"You're damn' right it's potent! You are in luck to have this little jewel. Only," he added as an afterthought, "look out for the Leopards. If they find it on

you it's sure death by the most lingering method they can devise, and they're some little devisers, believe me. I've seen some of their work and it wasn't pretty!"

Dooley clapped his hands loudly. A man appeared. He gave some detailed instructions in Japanese. The man saluted and disappeared.

"I'm going to send you to the border with an escort. I'll also send a detachment across to clear out any wandering bands of Bolsheviki frontier guards. I wish I could do more but that is the best I can turn out."

"Your best is blame good, Dooley," Davies returned, touched by the kindness of his old schoolmate so strangely found here in the nick of time, so far away from the world they had both known.

"Here's something that may come in handy."

Dooley brought forth a good map of Southern Siberia, part of Manchuria and part of Mongolia. The man returned. With him he had the weapons that had been taken from the four the night before.

"Everything is ready," announced Dooley.

They went forth into the courtyard where horses were waiting. Outside of the courtyard an escort of fifty men was drawn up, looking very businesslike on shaggy ponies, rifles slung across their backs, an air of disciplined strength about them.

"They look pretty good, Dooley," remarked Davies professionally. "I can see where you have the makings of a cavalryman in you after all—in other words you may get to heaven yet."

"If I do it's a cinch the place won't be crowded with cavalrymen!" Dooley, who was an infantryman by training, retorted.

Both laughed. Davies mounted his horse. Dooley shook hands with the party, coming at last to Davies.

"Listen here, old-timer, if you ever get into trouble within striking distance of me, send word to Tamaka, that's me! By messenger, or wireless, my call letter is TK and I'll break my neck trying to get to you."

"Damn' decent of you, Dooley. Thanks a thousand times old-timer, and so long," the two men gripped hands for a second. Davies rode away, following the chief of the escort who set out at a sharp trot.

He looked back. Dooley stood by the gate of the farmhouse, his eyes shaded with one hand, waving after him with the other. Davies waved back. They turned the corner and Dooley was lost to sight.

"That sure is one decent Jap," remarked Duggan, feeling reflectively of his neck, so nearly operated on by the Chinese executioner.

As they left the narrow track and started across fields, a flock of large dark birds arose from the ground, heavily, as though sated. Davies looked at the place and turned away.

"There's our Manchu friend of yesterday," he stated.

"Served him right," snorted Duggan. "I don't wish him any hard luck but I hope he don't waste any time gettin' himself to the hottest place there is."

He rode on silently for a space.

"Yeh, he sure is one decent Jap," he repeated. "It's queer to see a fellow talkin' perfect American, slang and everything and lookin' so much like a Jap."

"He came to America when he was nine years old. He was trained like an American boy and learned to speak English like one."

"Well, Old Lady Luck was with us when we hit him. I hope she don't desert us up here at this Chita place. Everybody gives that commissar guy up there a bad name. Well, it's all in the day's work," he concluded philosophically.

NATASHA looked refreshed from her night's rest. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes bright again. She rode along sitting gracefully and easily in her saddle. Her brother was silent and thoughtful as usual. The sun shone brightly; an occasional bird lifted his voice in song; the smell of leather and

the feel of a cavalry outfit once more made Davies rejoice. He began to sing.

"You are happy this morning?" Natasha asked.

"Yes."

"It is good. Seize such happiness as you can in life for always grim destiny waits ahead to turn our laughter into tears," and she stared somberly into the distance as though in an effort to pierce the veil that concealed the future from her gaze.

But she herself began to sing before many minutes had passed, singing that song they had heard in Hailar at the café, the song of the hero Semyon, he who had thrown his sweetheart to the wolves that he might thereby save his comrades. It was a poignantly sad thing sung as she sang it—her voice rich and pure and very melodious but with a throb of unhappiness in it that was typically Russian.

After half an hour's progress the leader brought the escort to a halt. Ten men were left with Davies' party while the remainder went ahead. The ones waiting behind dismounted and placed two sentries on watch. They stretched themselves out to smoke while the time passed.

"Just over that brook is Siberia," remarked Natasha, and she stared across to that country where she had suffered so much. Davies gazed over curiously, wondering what new dangers lay in store for them. Duggan wasted no time in vain imaginings. He looked after his horse and oiled his pistol and ammunition clips, to the intense interest of the soldiers of the escort who crowded around, looking at the big .45 automatic. Under Duggan's deft hands it was stripped down and taken apart seemingly without effort and as quickly assembled again ready for business.

The absent part of the escort returned shortly, leading three prisoners with them, three hairy and scowling looking Red soldiers, their hands bound behind them. The leader of the escort nodded to Davies and waved toward the other side as signal that all was well. A slight wiry man with keen, intelligent eyes, looking as though he might be part Russian and part Japanese, introduced himself as "Ishii", and stated that he had been deputed to accompany them.

The five mounted again and, waving goodby to their escort, forded the small brook and were upon Siberian soil. They traveled along swiftly, Davies being anxious to reach the railroad before dark so as to lay his plans to board the train.

He looked back once and saw the soldiers of the escort still staring after them. Soon the soldiers ceased their staring and mounted. After a few minutes Davies looked again. The men sent by Dooley had disappeared in the distance.

He faced the unknown country and the unknown conditions before him, feeling that Siberia was a vast country to tackle.

He had been instructed to keep on the track he was now following, a track which would begin to turn to the east after five miles. It was as he had been told, the track after about five miles of cantering, began to turn to the east.

Evidently the men sent out by Dooley had accomplished their work exceedingly well for they met no one with the exception of two wandering Oolets, shaggy men on shaggy ponies who were driving a herd of horses and gave the travelers a wide berth. An hour's ride brought them to the railroad track.

They followed this to the north, arriving finally at a small way station. There was no one there except the station master, a pock marked, gaunt faced individual, who had been drinking not wisely but too well. Him they found very friendly, even insistently friendly, almost forcing them to partake of some vodka with which he was celebrating. He had forgotten what was the occasion of his celebration but that made little difference.

BEFORE the time the train was due several peasants, carrying the miscellaneous bundles with which the traveling Russian peasant always burdens himself, came to the station. Davies was glad to see them arrive as it made his own party less noticeable.

The station master insisted upon treating the peasants. So successful was he that when the train finally did arrive three of them bade it a tearful farewell, embracing him in drunken gravity.

The train went on. Davies and his companions found themselves a compartment comparatively empty, with only two people in it. The two were Russians. One looked like a mechanic; the other had the air of being a former Russian priest of the Orthodox Church. He eyed the newcomers suspiciously and retired quickly into his prayerbook. The mechanic on the other hand soon struck up a conversation with the new arrivals. In five minutes his life story had been told. He was coming back from a trip to Harbin where he had been working and had saved up some money for his family. Ishii, sent by Dooley to accompany them, asked many questions of the young mechanic.

Davies watched the corridor, momentarily expecting the arrival of a conductor or some official asking for papers, but none came. They passed through miles of flat country containing few villages but many small stations, old Cossack guard posts before the Revolution, many of them now occupied by Red soldiers to guard against the Hung-Hutzes.

At some of the stations hot water was to be had, and Natasha, who had retained her satchel when they turned the horses loose to return to their owner, brought forth her tea pot and the mechanic added his supplies to theirs so that the six of them feasted very well, inviting the former priest finally to come in and join the party. Folding up his prayerbook, he worked havoc on the food supplies, for all his gaunt frame.

A driving rain had started, a cold sleety rain that hammered against the carriage roof like small shot. Hour after hour passed. The rain continued when at last they arrived at the main line of the Tran-Siberian Railway. Here they had to await the coming of the cross continent train going to the East. No one seemed to know just when it would arrive.

In the waiting room of the station were two men, in the red barred khaki and the pink hats of the Cheka. Browning automatics were strapped to their belts. These gentry caused some concern to the travelers until they saw that the two were very much interested in two recently arrived Russian women, who looked very well capable of taking care of themselves.

"The real danger will come at the station in Chita," Natasha informed them, "for Urivetsky, the red bearded commissar, has every arriving traveler examined."

Their train came at last, crowded to the roofs of the carriages, with platforms and washrooms filled with passengers.

Davies beckoned the other four with him and followed the two Cheka men. True to type, these arrogantly drove all the occupants from one compartment, then tried to inveigle their two women friends in. The women laughingly denied them and went on through the car, leaving the two crestfallen men possessors of a whole compartment.

Natasha, who was quick to see Davies' idea, smiled sweetly at the two men. They invited her in. She threw out her hands helplessly, pointing to her companions. The two Chekaists with poor grace invited them as well. The train started with the five travelers riding in the same compartment with two members of the Cheka, the most dreaded secret service of the Bolsheviki.

But these two were half drunk to start with. And Natasha encouraged them to drink more, pretending to drink with them as they tippled.

"As soon as we can," whispered Davies under cover of a Homeric burst of laughter from the two at one of Natasha's sallies, "we'll knock them in the head and get their uniforms."

Duggan's eyes sparkled. "Eventually—why not now?" he asked.

"Give them a few minutes more. They're drinking pretty heavily."

TO BE CONTINUED

Here is a Western mystery story that will really mystify you

TABLE STAKES

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

"WELL, I'll bank this said poker game," offered Buck Perry, as he took a seat at one corner of the table which Stuffy Axline had just pushed to the center of the bunkroom floor.

Lupe Lanagan eased his lengthy, double jointed frame into a chair on Perry's right, while Joroso Joe, the new hand, took a position opposite to Lanagan. Hux Carmody went into the kitchen for a box of matches to serve as chips.

Buck Perry, popular Trinchera Creek stockman, did not play poker himself. Nevertheless, he was always willing to watch a good game, played among his own cowboys in his own bunk shack, especially on such a rainy afternoon as this. On this occasion he was even willing to accommodate by acting as banker for the play.

Carmody, a burly redhead who was the champion scrapper of the outfit, came in from the kitchen with the matches.

"Aw, can't we rake up something better for chips than matches?" complained Joroso Joe, the new hand. "Matches are always breakin'."

"Yeh," agreed Lupe Lanagan, "and every time a fellah lights a cigaret, it costs him two bits."

"You're dead right about it, Lanagan," agreed Perry, "and if I'm goin' to bank this game I don't want nobody cashin' in two halves of the same match. Let's see; what can we use instead of matches?"

His eyes, moving about the room, fell upon Hux Carmody's cartridge belt. Each of the four cowboys wore belts which were lined with .45 cartridges from buckle to hips.

"I tell you," went on Perry, "why not use ca'tridges? Ca'tridges are solid and

heavy, as good as real chips. Turn your ca'tridges in to the bank, boys, and then buy 'em back at two bits a throw."

Perry himself wore no gun. He was a farmerish type of cowman, not of a gun toting temperament. Now, as usual, his chubby legs were encased in knee high field boots and the rest of his rotund anatomy in mud stained denim. Perry had been engaged in irrigating his vega stand when interrupted by this shower.

"Turn in your ca'tridges, boys," he invited the four prospective players. "Empty your belts, pockets and guns. Come to think of it, it's a purty good idea not to have no loaded guns around a poker game. Then if anybody gets sore he can't start shootin'."

Hux Carmody, Joroso Joe, Lupe Lanagan and Stuffy Axline emptied belts, pockets and guns, heaping all the shells in front of their boss, Perry. Every shell was a .45, so it made no difference whether a man got his original bullets back at the end of the game or not. Joroso Joe won the cut for deal and the game was on.

EACH player began play with twenty chips, bullets in this case, which he purchased from the banker for five dollars. Perry's only part in the game was to sell a player more chips if his stock became depleted, or to buy a few from the most prosperous player in case the bank's chips became depleted. As banker, Perry handled no cards himself.

A dozen hands were played with fairly even result. Finally along came a big pot, wherein Joroso Joe held fours against two pat hands and almost cleaned the board. Perry found himself watching Joroso a little suspiciously. Was the new hand all right, he wondered. In dealing, it was easy to see that he was an artisan of practise. His fingers were long, lean and shifty. He had a perfect poker face, too, thought Perry. It was cold, rigid, with never a crack or crease on it except that deep, conical cleft on the end of the man's close shaven chin.

However, Perry could detect no evidence that the new hand was not playing a straight game. Indeed, a few hands later Lupe Lanagan held queens-full against Joroso's flush, scooping in a pot of some thirty bullets.

"It's too bad Surcingle ain't here," mentioned Hux Carmody as he borrowed the ingredients of a cigaret from Axline, " 'cause then we could play five handed."

Perry grinned. Surcingle Dorn was Perry's fifth cowboy, now serving a ten-day sentence in the Trinidad jail. A Fourth of July ordinance of that progressive county seat had forbidden cowboys' bringing guns to town, which had so annoyed Surcingle Dorn that he had, after proper internal lubrication of himself, lighted a giant firecracker and thrust it into the hip pocket of a policeman.

"I hear some one comin' now," remarked Lupe Lanagan, cocking an ear at the sound of approaching hoof beats squanching through the mud. "Maybe that's Surcingle, and he's busted loose from jail."

Every one listened. It was raining harder now. The drops were beating a stubbornly insistent tattoo upon the roof. Above the sound of rain, Perry could hear a rider come to a halt and alight just without the bunk shack door.

THE MAN entered the shack, dripping, then removed a slicker which he tossed to one side.

"Howdy, Buck," he greeted, "and how's your good for nothing outfit of cowhands this afternoon?"

"Howdy, Ed," responded the ranchman with a cordial smile.

Ed Kane, deputy sheriff of this county, was always a welcome guest with any ethical ranch outfit between the Spanish Peaks and the Mesa de Maya. Kane was a youngish man of tall, athletic build, with pale blue eyes and extremely pink cheeks. There was a brass star on the lapel of his corduroy coat and a single, black butted gun at his hip.

"Sit in, Kane," invited Lupe Lanagan, "and I'll deal you a hand."

"But maybe Ed's come to make a pinch," suggested Hux Carmody.

Kane laughed good humoredly.

"No," he said, "Surcingle Dorn's in jail for ten days, I understand, so it wouldn't be fair to short hand Buck out of another saddle squeezer. Truth is, I *am* out to make a pinch, a murder pinch, but I don't figure to locate any killer at Buck Perry's bunk shack. I never have and I never expect to."

"What! Somebody get ventilated in this neck of the range, Ed?" Perry asked in surprise. He had heard of no killing.

Kane didn't answer immediately. For almost a minute there was no sound except the patter of rain on the roof. Perry noticed that Kane's eyes, though remaining amiable, were now rather fixedly turned upon the one man present he did not know, Joroso Joe.

Finally the deputy answered:

"It was the sheepman, Juan Medina, who lives three miles down Trinchera Creek. He was killed last night between eight and ten o'clock, and robbed of two thousand dollars. He'd sold a bunch of sheep the day before and hadn't banked the money. I'm on the job. Got any guesses, boys?"

Perry was sure he could detect just a hint of challenge in Kane's voice. The deputy continued to give particular attention to Joroso Joe. Perry himself turned to scrutinize the new hand. Joroso's manner, he observed, seemed merely one of mild interest. In or out of a poker game the man's mask was perfect.

It was Hux Carmody who replied:

"No, Kane, we ain't got any guesses. You don't think one of us done it, do you?"

"Frankly, I don't," answered Kane, "although there is one very small clue which indicates that one of you four cowboys, here assembled, did do it. If I didn't know you so well, I'd—"

"What!" cried Carmody, half rising from his seat and with his broad face flushed. "I don't exactly like that, Kane."

"I'm sorry, Hux," responded Kane evenly, "yet the fact remains that a small clue points to one of you four men. The clue does not suggest which of you did it. It merely suggests that one of you could have done it. A clue's a clue, and I got to run this'n down. After you four men pass out your alibis, explaining where you severally were between eight and ten last night, I'll vamoose and leave you go on with your game."

PERRY himself was much concerned. He, like Carmody, was inclined to take offense that suspicion should point toward an occupant of this bunkhouse. Then, being of a logical mind, Perry asked himself, "Why not?" Humans are born to err, he conceded, and why might not one of these four cowboys have erred, even to the extent of a night robbery and a killing?

His appraisal shifted from man to man of his men. Lupe Lanagan, he noticed, was not looking at Kane. His eyes were bent downward on the pack of cards he was shuffling. Stuffy Axline, on the other hand, was sitting up somewhat stiffly in his chair, watching Kane with a very odd expression. What did the expression indicate? Was it fright? Or merely ruffled dignity? Then Perry recalled, with a degree of shock, something that he had almost forgotten these many months. It was the fact that Axline had a record. He was, or was supposed to be, a reformed horsethief. He had once served a term for horse stealing. Later he had come back to the range, penitent, and Perry, always sympathetic with down and outers, had given him a job and a new start in life. Perry's opinion was that Axline had truly reformed and was going straight.

Hux Carmody, in tones of extreme pique, was asking:

"Alibis? You dare come in here and ask me if I got a alibi, Kane?"

But Perry sided with Kane. This was a thing which, for the repute of the ranch, must be cleared up immediately. Thus he assisted the deputy in an examination which delved thoroughly into the matter of alibis—only to learn that there were none. Hux Carmody had ridden out alone between eight and ten the night

before to poison a burro carcass for coyotes. Lanagan had ridden alone to Trinchera for the mail immediately after supper and had not reappeared until midnight. Stuffy Axline had gone over to pay a call on a homesteader girl of his acquaintance, finding the girl and her family absent from home. Joroso Joe, the new hand, had, so he claimed, been alone in the bunkhouse from eight to ten. Perry could not disprove that, for he, with his wife, occupied the main ranch-house and had retired to bed at eight o'clock. Thus any one of the four cowboys could physically have committed the Medina crime.

Perry however, did not fail to note the manner in which these alibis, although unprovable and therefore worthless, were offered. Joroso's issued from the thin lips of his stolid poker face. Lanagan offered his a trifle embarrassedly, shuffling the cards all the while and not looking at Kane. The man who displayed the greatest emotion was Stuffy Axline. He sat rigid on the edge of his chair and blinked, moist eyed, at Kane. Perry saw his lips distinctly twitch. As for Hux Carmody, his only reaction seemed to be one of temper. His cheeks were flushed to the roots of his red hair as he rasped at the deputy:

"That's nice and polite, now, ain't it? To walk in a bunk shack and pull a song and dance like that! What is this said clue you claim nails the deadwood on one of us four poor, ornery, lowdown poker players?"

"I claimed nothing of the kind," retorted Kane. "I admitted my clue was dinky, but, being any kind of a clue, it's got to be investigated. Perry, as I get it, these four men of yours held a target contest in the corral day before yesterday and used up every .45 cartridge on the place."

"That's right," admitted Perry. "Who told you that?"

"Steve Brandon, who runs the hardware store at Trinchera. You told him yourself, yesterday afternoon, when you went into his store, commissioned to buy four boxes of .45's, one for each of these four men."

"Correct," granted Perry.

"Perry wrapped up the four boxes of shells. Three of the boxes happened to be of the UMC make, his usual line. But the fourth box chanced to be of UX make, almost obsolete, though good cartridges. Brandon had just that one box of UX's left, and thought he'd get rid of it. It's the first box of that brand he'd sold in a year. Which of your four men did you give the box of UX's?"

"I don't know," responded Perry. "As I rode by the bunk shack, I tossed the package in the open door."

"I picked it up," admitted Joroso Joe immediately, "busted it open and grabbed off the top box of shells. They were UMC's."

"I grabbed off the next box," insisted Lanagan. "I stuffed the ca'tridges in my pockets and belt. They were UMC's."

"Me too," exclaimed Carmody. "I got the third box and they were UMC's."

Kane's eyes turned a trifle coldly on the fourth cowboy, the reformed horse-thief, Stuffy Axline.

"Axline," challenged Kane, "then you must have got the box of UX's."

"I did no such thing," denied Axline shrilly. "That's it; once a man gets a bad name, you try to pin everything on him. I tell you my box was UMC's, too. I saw the label plain. And I throwed the box right over there in that wastebasket."

Axline pointed.

AS KANE went over to a wastebasket to investigate its contents, Joroso Joe said, in a perfectly calm voice:

"Maybe Steve Brandon just thought he put in a box of UX's. And what if he did? Was that sheepman shot with a UX shell?"

Kane, bending over, was pawing about in the trash of the basket. In a moment he came up, not with one, but with four empty cartridge boxes. He brought them to the table, exposing their labels. Perry easily observed that three were UMC's and one was a UX.

"Which proves what?" asked Hux Carmody.

Perry attended Kane's reply in acute suspense. Outside, he was aware, the rain had slackened. There was no patter on the roof. Only a *drip-drip-drip* from the eaves. Through the open door Perry could see Kane's horse, head drooped, flanks shivering, standing cock kneed in the mud.

"Which proves," Kane said crisply just then, "that three of you four cowboys told me the truth, and one told me a lie. And yes, Medina got his with a .45 UX shell. Here's the shell." Kane took from his pocket an empty shell and held it up for all to see.

"A minute ago it was only a dinky clue," said the deputy, "but now it's what you might call a right hot clue. Because one of you four cowboys just lied about the make of his shells. Why should an innocent man lie about a little thing like that? Now listen! Whichever three of you fellows are innocent are automatically appointed my deputies the instant I accuse the fourth man. The fourth man, the one I'm going to accuse of killing Medina and stealing his two thousand dollars, is in this room. He's at this poker table. The man who objects to being searched is indicating his own guilt. So stand up, the four of you, and be searched."

The clear logic of Kane's brief of the situation was undeniable; it sobered even Hux Carmody. Carmody's flushed face indicated that he was mad, all right, that his cowboy dignity had been grievously insulted; nevertheless he stood up to be searched. Joroso, Axline and Lanagan likewise stood up to be searched, each eying the others. It was quite obvious that the first to make a hostile move would have a whole roomful to fight.

Perry, as he watched Kane go about the searching, noticed that the deputy did not concern himself very much with searching pockets for loot. Kane, he reasoned, would know that the guilty man would have cached the loot somewhere else than on his person. Kane appeared to be looking for bullets, .45 bullets. He was looking for one or more UX cartridges in gun, pocket or belt.

He found none. Every gun and belt was empty.

Perry, waving a thumb toward the five small cones of cartridges lying on the poker table, explained the why of it.

"Usin' 'em for chips," he told Ed Kane.

Kane understood. Turning to the table, he examined the five small heaps of bullets, one of which was in front of each player and one being directly in front of Perry and comprising the bank.

In a moment Kane said:

"I see about one out of about every four of these bullets is a UX. Which man furnished the bank with the UX's?" he asked Perry.

Perry didn't know. The trademark on the brass cap of each shell was very small. No one would be likely to scrutinize the tiny characters unless he had particular reason to do so.

And the chips, having by now been passed through many pots, were quite mixed. Even if all the UX's had been in front of one man it would have meant nothing at all. For such a man might just have won them from his neighbor.

"But," said Kane, "there's still another way to skin this cat. I'll now proceed to gather up all guns, take 'em in the kitchen and examine the firing pins." With this statement, the deputy took from his pocket a small magnifying glass and the empty UX shell found at the scene of the Medina crime. Next he plucked the guns of the four cowboys from their several holsters.

None of the four, Perry observed, seemed to be considering resistance. How could they, thought Perry. Kane was the only man present armed with a loaded gun; moreover each innocent man of the company was Kane's natural ally.

WHEN Kane had possession of the guns of Carmody, Axline, Joroso and Lanagan, he asked Perry—

"Who does that iron hanging there on the wall belong to?"

Perry followed Kane's pointed finger

and saw still another .45 gun, hanging by its trigger guard from a nail on the bunkroom wall.

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Perry. "That'n belongs to Surcingle Dorn. But he's been in jail since the Fourth, so he couldn't have done the job last night."

"Some one could have borrowed his gun to turn the trick with, though," reminded Kane dryly. "I'll take Surcingle's gun, too." He walked over and took Surcingle Dorn's gun from the nail. "And now, Perry," he said, "while I'm in the kitchen looking over all firing pins, you count the poker chips. Don't disturb any of the separate piles; just total 'em, and be ready to tell me how many UMC's there are, and how many UX's. You other four fellahs, watch each other. The first one makes a crack, or tries to leave the room, the other three climb him. *Adios.*"

Abruptly Kane, lugging five empty guns, passed into the bunkhouse kitchen. Perry noticed that he closed the partition door behind him.

The five men left around the poker table reseated themselves. There was an awkward silence. Joroso Joe rolled a cigaret. Lanagan began tapping one boot toe nervously on the floor; overhead the rain, augmenting in volume, again began to dash upon the roof. Perry, before beginning a count of the chips, looked from face to face of his men, trying to decide which was the most likely to be guilty of the crime. Here was a stain which must be wiped out; it offended and shamed Perry. He was fully as anxious as Kane to fix the guilt and thus clear the remaining three cowboys.

Which—wondered Perry. Most likely of all, he decided, it was the poker faced alien from Joroso who had killed and robbed Medina. Next in line for suspicion would come the ex-horsethief, Axline. Had Axline really reformed? Perry recalled having heard it said that a thief can not, any more than a leopard, change his spots. Moreover Axline seemed to be the most agitated of the quartet.

True, Carmody and Lanagan seemed also nervous, ill at ease. But who would not be? A capital decision was pending, to be brought in in a few minutes by a jury of one. When Kane entered he would say which of the firing pins had made the dent on the empty UX shell.

As if reading Perry's thought, Joroso said coldly—

"I'm glad he's lookin' them firin' pins over, 'cause mine'll clear me."

"And mine'll clear me," yelped Lanagan, jerkily.

"And mine me," insisted Hux Carmody.

"And mine'll clear me." These last words came in an eager voice from Stuffy Axline—in an overly eager voice, Perry thought. "Because," went on Axline, "I haven't shot my gun since I got the new box of shells yesterday afternoon. Every shell I got out of that box is right here on this poker table."

"All mine are here, too," echoed Lanagan.

"Mine too," from Carmody.

"Mine too." Joroso Joe made it unanimous.

"In that case," said Buck Perry, "there ought to be two hundred chips on the table, because they came fifty in a box. I see now why Ed wanted me to count 'em."

THE STOCKMAN proceeded to count the makeshift poker chips, doing so without disturbing the separate piles. He counted twice, checking himself. The result was one hundred and fifty UMC's and forty-nine UX's.

"The man who had the UX's," announced Perry, "not only lied about havin' 'em, but he's used one bullet. Still more proof that there's one liar, thief and killer under this roof."

He looked fixedly into the eyes of Joroso Joe for a full ten seconds. Joroso did not flinch. Perry then turned a stern regard upon Axline, who did flinch perceptibly.

"And remember," cautioned Perry, "Kane says that each innocent man automatically becomes his deputy the instant he accuses the criminal. And listen, I hear him comin'."

The door from the kitchen opened, and there stood Kane. His face was set in grim lines. His arms were full of empty guns. All of the five men at the poker table arose to face him.

"Did you find out which firing pin punctured the UX?" asked Perry.

As he put the question he made ready to leap, either upon Joroso Joe or upon Stuffy Axline.

Kane's reply, however, somewhat relaxed the tension.

"The shot was fired," said Kane, advancing to the group by the table, "from Surcingle Dorn's gun. Dorn's in jail, which leaves him out of it. It means that one of these four poker players, here, was just cute enough to borrow Dorn's gun from off that peg on the wall and use it instead of his own. Perry, take care of Dorn's gun."

The deputy tossed Dorn's weapon to the ranchman.

"Moreover," Kane continued, "you fellows can have your own back again, as they're no good for evidence. They're all unloaded, so no danger of the guilty man cracking down on anybody."

Kane himself inserted the proper pistol in each of the four holsters, Lanagan's, Carmody's, Joroso's and Axline's.

As he did so, Perry told him about the count of chips, which indicated three full boxes of UMC's and the UX box with a bullet short.

"That," responded Kane, "plus the fact that one man lied, plus the fact that Dorn's gun fired the shot, is the last stick of John Brown deadwood. I'm not leavin' this room until I've got the cuffs on Medina's killer."

"But how," inquired Perry puzzledly, "are you going to do that? It's a stalemate, looks to me like. It's one of these four, but which? Which one you goin' to accuse?"

"I'll let the killer accuse himself," said Kane blandly. "And how? Why, by sitting in this poker game myself. For a chip I'll use the empty shell which killed Medina. Gents, cowboys and murderer, be seated."

Without further comment, Ed Kane pulled up a sixth chair to the table. He placed it in a position between Axline and Joroso, and sat down. Gaping at him, the others sat down also.

"Do the chips lie just as they did when I intruded the first time," asked Kane.

"They do," acknowledged Perry.

"Very well," said Kane, "all I have to do is to pay the bank two bits for every .45 shell on my person, and draw cards."

He drew his pistol, which was a Colt .45, and from it he extracted five cartridges. They were of Colt manufacture. Kane wore no cartridge belt, but from his pockets he produced fourteen more bullets, which made nineteen in all. To this pile he added the incriminating UX empty, which gave him twenty chips. He then handed a five dollar bill to the non-playing banker, Perry. He was thus financially installed as a player, according to the rules of the game.

"HERE we sit," he remarked, as Lanagan began dealing, "five men in a poker game, all with empty guns. Before the game's over, the man who shot and robbed Medina will give himself away. Two bits ante, did you say, Lanagan? All right, here's mine. Everybody decorate the green."

Each player placed in the center of the table, as nucleus for the pot, one bullet. Kane's contribution was the empty UX shell.

"I don't see where all this is goin' to get you," exclaimed Perry.

"You don't, but you will. I can think of two or three plays the guilty man could make with these chips, whereby he would accuse himself," said Kane.

Lanagan having dealt, Joroso opened with queens on twos. No one had a decent staying hand and so Joroso won the slim pot by default. This gave him the empty UX.

But he did not have it long. He shoved it to the center on the next ante, and the pot was won by Lanagan. Two minutes later, Stuffy Axline became possessed of the empty UX. Then Carmody took it

on a great hand which broke Kane and caused him to buy ten more bullets from the bank.

The chips circulated. No chip circulated so briskly, Perry noticed, as the incriminating UX. Was that Kane's game? He wondered. Was Kane counting on the psychological effect of the empty UX on a guilty conscience? Already the killer must have handled the one vital exhibit of evidence competent to hang him. The shell whose charge had murdered Medina! Was that Kane's game?

If so, Perry found himself unable to get excited over it. The man would be a fool if, while handling the chip, he should commit such an ostentatious blunder as, for instance, to hurl it through the open window. A thing like that would be an open and shut giveaway, thought Perry.

Kane, Perry noticed, had now become as poker faced as Joroso Joe. He said nothing. He let his chips talk. All the while he watched his cards, the pot, his opponents' hands, shrewdly and with true poker avarice. He was playing poker.

On the roof the rain pattered. It dripped from the eaves. A gust of it blew in the open door. Kane's horse, just without, shook itself impatiently, rustling the leathers of its back.

The game went on. Lanagan's manner, to Perry, continued to seem nervous, embarrassed. Joroso Joe maintained his coldly even temper; except for the cleft on his chin there was not a crack or crevice on his perfect poker face. Hux Carmody continued to display an injured dignity. Axline, conceded by Perry as the man of weakest mentality in the room, was the only one who gave evidence of genuine fright. Axline was sweating; he watched Kane closer than he watched his cards; his mind did not seem to be on the game at all.

Yet it was clear that none of the four cowboys wanted the empty UX. As fast as it was won, it was lost. It was always the first chip of the ante. Each player eschewed its custody as if it were a pellet of poison.

Finally Axline was forced to keep it for six consecutive pots, for the reason that his luck caused him to win these pots whether he would or no. Perry saw Axline loosen the collar of his shirt, then reach for a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow. The chips piled in front of Axline, yet this oft envied fortune seemed to bring him no thrill of exultation. He lost the next pot, and the empty shell, by the simple expedient of throwing his hand down after Kane had opened on two queens.

The deputy happened to fill with a third queen, winning the pot. He raked it in, along with the empty UX shell.

THE NEXT deal was Kane's. As he gathered in the cards, Perry noticed that he picked up, separately, the five pasteboards which had been discarded by Axline and looked them over.

"That's funny, Axline," said Kane, turning sharply to the man addressed, "you had three kings before the draw, yet you stayed out of the pot."

Perry looked quickly at Axline. He saw that the man lacked little of being in a funk of fright now; the fellow was not meeting Kane's eyes.

Kane, it was, who replied to his own implied question.

"You did it, Axline, to lose the UX empty. The thing was getting your goat, and you didn't want it around. Isn't that right?"

The deputy picked up the leadless UX chip. Perry saw him look whimsically at the tiny trademark stamped on its brass cap. Then, suddenly, Kane's expression changed. He stared a moment at the shell's cap, and then said slowly:

"Well, fellows, the murder's out. How do I know? Because this isn't a UX at all. It's a UMC. The UX empty has disappeared."

"What?" cried Perry, leaping to his feet.

He saw that Axline's chin had dropped to his chest and that he was speechless. Then the ex-horsethief again mopped his handkerchief through the beads of sweat on his forehead.

"You say the UX has disappeared?" asked Perry.

"This shell in my hand is the only empty in play, you notice," affirmed Kane. "And it's a UMC. Axline had possession of the UX for six pots. He must have realized the power of its evidence. So he switched it for a UMC empty. When I searched his pockets an hour ago I found, of course, that he had no loaded bullets on him. The loaded bullets were all in the game. But he did happen to have two empty UMC's. Search him again, Perry. You'll find he's now got one empty UMC and one UX."

Perry came around the table to Axline. Lanagan, Joroso and Carmody, at Kane's order, remained seated. Perry searched Axline thoroughly and indeed found one empty UMC in the pocket from which the man had drawn a handkerchief. But he found no UX. Kane himself checked the search. No UX came to light. In that respect the deputy seemed to have erred.

It was Perry who noticed the knothole, about an inch in diameter, in the pine floor at Axline's feet.

"Maybe he dropped the UX through that knothole!" suggested the ranchman.

"Bet that's exactly what he did," agreed Kane. "He saw that convenient knothole right between his own boots, and the temptation was too much. He switched shells, then dropped the UX through the floor. After that he wanted to get rid of the phony empty, before any one discovered the shift. So he discarded a pat three kings."

"I didn't do it," shrieked Axline, at last finding his voice.

"Didn't do what?" asked Kane.

"I didn't shoot or rob Medina," bleated Axline. "Honest I didn't."

"What for was you so anxious to ditch the empty UX, then?" asked Kane, coldly. He then turned to Perry. "Buck, is there any way to get under this bunkhouse?"

"Yes," replied Perry, "the dog sleeps under here. The floor's about two feet above ground and there's a couple of boards off where the dog goes in and out."

"Get a flashlight, Buck," Kane instructed. "Then go out and crawl in at the dog hole, and get under this knothole. Bring back the UX, 'cause I need it for evidence."

PERRY went to a cabinet, in which he found a flashlight. With this he stepped out into the drizzle of rain. Soon the others heard him squirming, belly down, under the floor boards. A faint illumination came up through the knothole at Axline's feet, indicating that Perry's light was in service.

"Your guilty conscience sure gave you away, Axline," said Kane, as he grasped Axline by the arm.

"I haven't any guilty conscience," whined Axline. "I didn't shoot Medina. I switched the shells, all right, but I didn't shoot Medina."

"Why did you switch the shells then?" Kane wanted to know.

"Because," wailed Axline, "I was afraid you'd pin the job on me whether I done it or not. I've got a record, haven't I? And as soon as you'd seen Frank McBride, he'd tell you—"

"Who," interrupted Kane, "is Frank McBride?"

"He's the man who bought the sheep from Medina, day before yesterday. I happened to be there, and saw the two thousand paid over. So I knew Medina had the money. When you found that out, and backed it with my record, you'd railroad me. And I could see both you and Buck figgered I done it. So I switched the chips. But I didn't drop the UX through the knothole. I tossed it over there under that bunk."

Kane regarded his prisoner shrewdly. It seemed to the deputy that the man's testimony contained a tiny flavor of sincerity. If he were guilty, why should he confess to throwing the shell under the bunk? Why did he not merely let Perry come back empty handed, thus confounding the accusation?

"All right, Axline," said Kane finally, "crawl under that bunk, then, and retrieve the UX shell."

Axline dropped to all fours and crawled under the bunk indicated. In a moment he came out with an empty shell. Kane immediately identified it as the original and incriminating UX. He laid it on the table and then, as a new thought struck him, he turned quickly to look at the other three poker players.

For a full minute his attention had been riveted upon Axline. He now saw that Lanagan, Joroso and Carmody were still seated. He noticed however that Lanagan had pushed his chair about a foot farther from the table.

A scuffle beneath the floor drew Kane's attention to Perry.

"Hey, Buck," the deputy yelled, "come on out from under the house. No need to look for that shell because I've already found it."

Perry answered, and his words startled Kane.

"*You ain't found nothin', Kane,*" bawled Perry from beneath the floor. "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut till I get there. And don't let nobody load his gun."

KANE stiffened. Load his gun! The deputy's eyes sought the six heaps of chips, five in the table stakes of the several recent players and one in Perry's abandoned bank. Throughout the game, Kane was sure, there had been no opportunity for any player to snatch a few chips from his pile and load his gun. The movement would have been too ostentatious. But what about the last minute or so? With Axline practically convicted and commanding attention, why couldn't Lanagan, or Joroso, or Carmody, have loaded his gun?

Had such a thing happened? Easily proved, thought Kane. He would have Perry—

His thought was interrupted by Perry's entrance. The chubby little ranchman came running to the table in tremendous excitement; he tossed a sheaf of bills, new currency, in that central portion of the board reserved for poker pots.

"It's an even two thousand," yelped Perry. "The Medina loot! Hid in the dust under the bunk shack."

The atmosphere of the room became, at this development, almost stifling. Kane, his muscles as taut as a drawn bow string, noticed that Lanagan, Joroso and Carmody had leaped to their feet.

He yelled:

"Perry, rake the chips into your hat, ten at a time. Count 'em by tens, and do it quickly. Unless somebody has loaded his gun in the last three minutes, there'll be exactly two hundred and eighteen loaded bullets on the table. If somebody has loaded his gun, he, and not Axline, is the man who shot Juan Medina."

Perry took off his hat, began raking chips into it ten at a time. He, banker of this poker game, was now making the final tally. Two bits a chip. Why, even one of these chips was now worth a man's life. Ten at a time the bullets dropped into Perry's hat. Their clinking falls, and the patter of rain on the roof, were the only sounds of the room.

At last Perry announced:

"Two hundred and fourteen. Some one has snitched four slugs, Kane."

"And it wasn't Axline," said Kane, his pale blue eyes shifting quickly from Lanagan to Carmody to Joroso Joe, "because I had Ax by the arm all the time."

"Well!" exclaimed Perry.

Lanagan echoed—

"Well!"

And likewise Joroso Joe echoed—

"Well!"

His tone was that of a man baffled; but he kept his poker face. The game was not over yet.

Kane himself must have realized this, for he said:

"So this last hand's goin' to be a real pot after all. Here we stand, six men around a poker table, five with empty guns and one whose gun is heeled with four bullets. Four bullets. That's a hard hand to beat. No chance to bluff, either. It's a showdown. Carmody, Joroso or Lupe Lanagan, show your four bullets and take the pot."

No one moved a muscle.

"Any one of you three," Kane continued, "can acquit yourself by pulling your gun, breaking it, and laying it open on the table. The instant a man does that, I nominate him deputy of the law. The man who fails to do so, he—"

Bump! Bump! Two guns hit the table, open at the hinge. Their cylinders were empty and clean; they came from clean hands, the hands of Carmody and Joroso Joe. Lupe Lanagan likewise drew; retaining his weapon, he aimed it at Kane's breast. His left hand went under the table. He stepped back two paces, pulling the table with him.

"All right, Kane," Lanagan challenged, "play this last hand then. Here I am with four bullets and your saddled horse at the door. Make your bet and be damned!"

Kane yelled:

"Perry, Carmody, Axline and Joroso, don't forget; you're deputies of the law!"

"And not a loaded gun in the bunch," sneered Lanagan, the black muzzle of his gun waving like the head of an adder to command the room. "First four jaspers who try to load guns," Lanagan threatened, "or steps my way, gets their'n."

Lanagan's eyes were deadly. It was plain he would shoot to kill.

LANAGAN'S next move was to snatch two objects from the table. One was the incriminating UX shell; the other was the package of bills, the two thousand dollars in loot. He stuffed these in his pockets. Next he snatched Perry's hat, weighted with two hundred and fourteen bullets, the only ones in the room except the four in his own gun.

Then, slowly, he began backing toward the open door.

"You're licked, Kane," he sneered. "I got the highest hand in poker, four bullets."

"Not necessarily," retorted Kane, "because according to Hoyle there's one hand which beats four bullets."

"What's that?" challenged Lanagan, now within two paces of the open door.

"A straight flush," cried Kane, and lunged across the room, in a flying dive, toward Lanagan.

"You—"

Lanagan checked his oath as his hammer clicked four times.

A split second later Kane's head struck him in the ribs and knocked him down.

Carmody, the scrappy redhead, was close behind the deputy. He cracked Lanagan over the head with a gun butt. Lanagan groaned, rolled over on the floor and lay still.

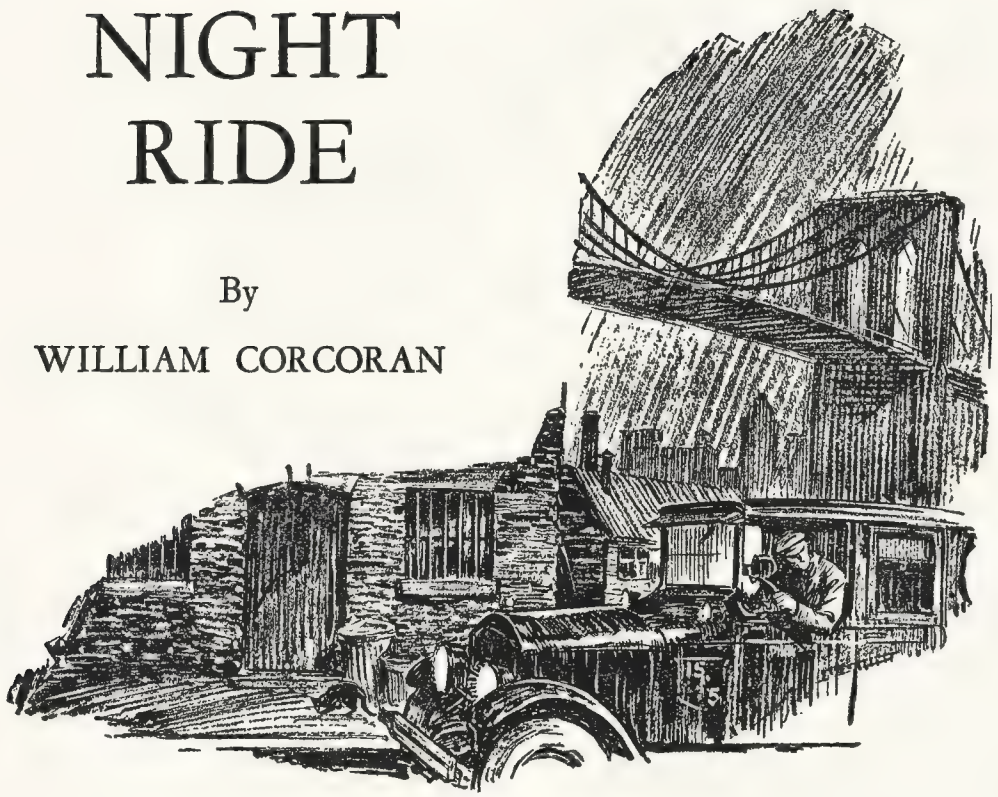
"A straight flush!" repeated Kane, breathing heavily over Lanagan, "because when I went out into the kitchen, I took a hack saw that somebody had been using to amputate hambones with, and sawed the firing pins off of all five guns."

Lanagan groaned once more. Carmody, Axline and Joroso Joe, redeemed now to honor, sat down upon bunks with sighs of relief. Perry dropped to his knees and, still banking the game, began gathering the scattered chips. The bunkhouse dog came in, dripping, shivering, and sniffed at Lanagan. Kane closed the door on the wisps of drizzle. Overhead one could still hear the delicate, intimate patter as it tinkled on the shingles of the roof.

NIGHT RIDE

By

WILLIAM CORCORAN



"If a couple of hundred city detectives can't touch him, how far do you *expect to get . . . ?"*

STEVE O'NEIL sought a man. All day Steve's eyes looked for a slender, dark face he found it impossible to forget. Lean, pinched nostrils, small mouth with ill shaped lips, pupils which gleamed with the opaque black of spilled ink. A shrewd face, a cunning face. A face Steve could wish to smash with his hard right fist.

Steve O'Neill had seen that face only once. It was a cold night in March, months before. That day the departing winter had made a dying and vicious gesture and filled the streets with snow which melted as it fell. Such weather meant business for hackmen, and Steve did not put up his cab when night came. There were two calls for every free taxi. Hour after hour Steve dropped one fare only to admit another on the spot. Steve, twenty-seven, blue eyed and genial, six feet of sturdy strength, was tireless.

At ten o'clock there came a lull. He pulled up beside a Coffee Pot, and in the warmth of the restaurant he counted his receipts. He had hacked twenty-five dollars. His tips were close to ten. In the language of New York hackmen, seven "pounds"! A good day's pay for a gruelling, nasty day's work. Steve was content.

A MAN stood beside the cab when Steve went outside. He was hatless, and he wore the black jacket of a waiter. He was heavy, his nose had at some time been broken, and his hands were large.

"Want a rip, Mac?" he asked Steve.

"Where to?"

"I dunno. Brooklyn, maybe."

Steve yawned and smiled.

"Nothing doing. I'm packing in."

"I'm telling you to take it," said the man. "It's worth a pound note anyways. Make a deal with him."

"No," said Steve.

"Jez, give me a break, Mac! I'm expecting a sawbuck out of this. I gotta get a cab for him."

Steve, in the seat, looked at the man.

"Well, where is he?"

"At's a stuff, Mac!" beamed the man. "Back up a ways. Under the lamp post. I'll show you."

Steve backed up. The man rode on the running board, shivering hardily in the snow chill.

Two men and a girl entered the cab. They issued, when the waiter went for them, from a darkened areaway gate. Steve knew it was a speakeasy. One of the men was of a type with the waiter. The girl was young, pretty; her eyes were bright and the pallor and scarlet of her face were pathetically artificial. The second man paused with one foot on the step and looked at Steve.

"We're going for a ride, brother, what I mean. There's five bucks in it for you. Head over the Manhattan Bridge and out Atlantic Avenue."

"How far out?"

"I'll tell you when to stop. If I like the way you drive maybe I'll do better."

"O. K.," said Steve. But he spoke without enthusiasm.

ON THE way Steve thought of the pretty, young face of the girl inside. It was an innocent face, and inexperienced. There was a certain untouched sweetness about her which that makeup could not disguise. She had glanced at him as she entered the cab. He recognized the glance; that of a kid who suddenly finds herself attractive to men. Not to boys, but to mature and scarred veterans of the world. Fool kid, looking in every man's face for the avarice she thinks is admiration!

What was she doing with that snake eyed egg who hired him? Steve knew men, and knew this man at a glance. Genial, wisecracking, free with his cash—and beneath, the soul of a rat. Ten to one he had a rod in his pocket, and would empty it into his best friend, if it suited him.

Oh, well—it takes all kinds of rackets to keep the world rolling.

They crossed the bridge, speeding over the upper drive. The river gleamed with oily ripples far below. The snow had ceased to fall, and a cold wind moaned through the great suspension cables.

Flatbush Avenue. Heavy traffic in downtown Brooklyn. Atlantic Avenue at last, and noisy speed on the way out. Soon the dingy quiet of farther Brooklyn. Quiet broken by the occasional roar of a Long Island train racing along the L structure overhead. Slush, misty street lights, and brown wooden houses with unlighted windows. Scarcely any traffic now.

From the cab interior came the sound of the folding seat snapping down. The sliding window opened. One of them was on the seat and leaning out beside Steve.

"Pull up here."

Steve glanced at him. It was the rat. He was smiling. Steve slowed.

"Pull up where?"

"Right here."

Steve pressed the gas to the floor. The cab jerked into speed. The man thrust the hard barrel of an automatic against Steve's body under the armpit.

"I said here, brother."

Steve let the racing motor die and pulled up at the curb. They were half way along a block, with no street light near. Beside them a great, bare factory building reared emptily. The neighborhood was deserted.

The man with the gun got out. He stared at Steve. The heavy steel jack handle caught his eye, thrust down alongside the seat cushion. Steve always carried it so, ready. The man jerked it out

and tossed it into the snow behind him.

"Out of there," he ordered.

Steve got out. He stood on the curb. His jaw was set, but there was no emotion in his eyes.

"This a stickup?" he asked.

"Don't you like it?" The man smiled.

Steve glanced into the cab. Dimly he could see the two in there, watching. The man was at ease. The girl was erect. He could not see her face. She was rigid, wordless, as if numbed.

"Let's have what jack you got," ordered the man with the gun.

He was not smiling now. Steve stood looking at him.

The man cursed suddenly, without passion, and struck Steve across the face with his left hand. Steve recoiled from the blow, and then froze, his hands drawn behind him.

"Take that and like it," said the man. He held the gun straight at Steve. "Come across!"

Steve opened his heavy coat and drew a wad of bills. The man grabbed it and thrust it into his pocket.

"Give me the rest," he said.

"The silver?"

"Anything you got."

Steve scooped out of his coat the load of coin that had accumulated. It was an overflowing handful, well over a pound in weight. It disappeared with the bills.

"Take your coat off."

Steve obeyed. The man threw it inside the cab. He made Steve face about, and with his left hand he searched Steve thoroughly.

"Now take off the shoes."

"My shoes?" Steve faced about.

"Don't ask questions. Get them off."

Once again Steve obeyed, sitting on the running board. His feet shrank from icy contact with the pavement. The man tossed the shoes on the floor beside the driver's seat.

"Now start walking."

This was more than Steve could bring himself to do instantly. On his cheeks two bright spots glowed redly. Wrath trembled on his upper lip. He looked at the man with the gun. But there was nothing to say.

"Jez, will you get out of here!" snarled the man. He slapped Steve on the face, advancing, the gun pressing into Steve's body. Steve retreated, turned and walked a few steps, and looked back. The man was getting into the driver's seat. The gears clashed, and the taxi began to move. The man waved a hand derisively.

"So long, brother. Keep your feet dry!"

And the cab was gone, up the avenue and around the corner out of sight.

STEVE started walking, his bare feet splashing in the dirty slush.

That was the first time Steve saw the rat. It would not, he felt certain, be the last. The city was big, but the rat would show up sometime, some place, and Steve would be waiting for him. It took a lot of forgetting to erase the sting of those blows and the recollection of that walk through the snow. And then there was the money. And the girl. Yes, the girl.

They found the cab next day, abandoned on a side street out Fort Hamilton way in Brooklyn. The police were relieved to turn it over to him and frankly skeptical of accomplishing anything more on the case. They had too much experience with others like it. He rode out on the Fourth Avenue Subway to the 68th Precinct station house at Eighty-sixth Street, and got the cab. Then he called a city phone number no New Yorker ever forgets, the ominous call for Police Headquarters on Centre Street—

"Spring 3100."

He was readily connected with Detective Nolan of the Auto Squad. He and Nolan had gone to public school together. The detective's voice came over the wire, sympathetic, but weighted with the cynical tolerance of experience.

"I'm telling you, Steve," said Nolan, "there ain't a thing you can do. You got your rig back. Let the rest go. You won't be the first."

"Well, I'd like to square myself with that rat. I got reasons."

"So have the others, boy. That don't catch no thieves."

"Mine are special."

Detective Nolan hesitated.

"What's the matter, kid? You holding out something?"

"I just don't like his face. Reason enough, ain't it?"

"Yeah. I suppose so. Only what you'd like to do ain't always what you'd better do, not in this business."

"Don't worry," said Steve.

"I won't," said Nolan. Steve could almost see his smile.

Steve O'Neill recognized the wisdom of this advice, but he did not follow it. There remained with him a resentment that flared anew into baffled anger every time that sly, laughing face came to mind. He looked for it in the crowds around him. He hacked from the corner where he had received the call that snowy night. He visited the speakeasy in off hours and attempted to worm information from the man who stood guard on the areaway gate. He received only declarations of ignorance and glassy stares.

More and more, too, Steve thought of the girl. As a hackman he knew women, for his was a disillusioning school. And that was a good kid, if ever he saw one. Foolish, maybe, but too young and regular to know different. All she needed was a decent break. What had happened to her that night was a subject for rather morbid speculation. She had been shocked and frightened during those few moments on Atlantic Avenue, too frightened even to speak as she sat upright in her seat looking out at Steve. Obviously it was all news to her, and bad news. And where was she now? It would have been a lot easier to let the matter drop if he had some reassurance on that score.

THEN one day Steve O'Neil saw the face of the rat a second time. Not the man, but his picture. It appeared in most of the morning papers, accompanying a story of gang feud and murder on the lower East Side. Two men had been shot to death in a little restaurant on Rivington Street the night before. The killers, presumably, were unknown. But the two dead men had been gunmen for a gang which was at war with Goldy Meyer's mob. The papers hinted that it might just be possible that Goldy's men had a hand in it. They printed Goldy's picture. And Steve, seeing it, knew he had found the rat.

Steve was waiting in the Auto Squadroom at headquarters when Detective Nolan came down from the morning lineup. The squadroom was full of smoke and hearty voices and men passing among the desks.

"Well, I found him," Steve announced.

"Yes?" said Nolan. "Where?"

"That's where you come in. I want you to tell me where to locate him. It's this cheap gunman, Goldy Meyer."

Interest quickened in Nolan's eyes.

"Oh, so it was Goldy, eh? Well, I'm not surprised at anything Goldy pulls. See the papers?"

"That's how I found him. By his picture."

"And you want to see him?"

"I do."

"Why?"

Steve returned the detective's stare.

"I got something to square with him. I'll leave you fellows out of it."

Nolan lighted a cigar.

"Listen, kid. Headquarters has been after Goldy for a year. We know pretty much everything he's done. He's done enough to rate the chair. But we haven't touched him."

"Well?" said Steve.

"Here's the point, kid. We can't touch him. Get that?"

"I ain't thrilled."

"All right," Nolan agreed amiably, "but if a couple of hundred city detectives who are in the know can't touch him, how far do you expect to get?"

Steve walked to the water cooler. He drank, and returned.

"You just give me the dope on Goldy and leave him to me," he told Nolan. "What you guys can't do is plenty, anyway."

"There's plenty we can do, and don't you forget it."

"Well, pull him in on robbery and assault then. I'll get you a warrant."

Nolan laughed.

"He'd be out of our fingers in half an hour on a writ. And you'd get bumped off so neat we'd never hear about it."

"I know. That was a bluff. I'm going to take care of Goldy in my own private way."

"Jez, go ahead. I'll look in at your inquest. You're going to do either of two things: get bumped off, or bump him off yourself and take a rap for it."

"Well, it'll be my inquest, won't it? Come on, give me the dope."

Nolan sighed.

"O. K., kid. Have it your way. I'll try and make Goldy pay for the funeral."

And Steve got the dope he wanted.

THAT evening Steve O'Neill remained on the streets and hacked through theater hour. When the ten o'clock lull came he drove to the lower East Side to an address on Christie Street. He found a grimy, red brick house bearing the number he sought. It was a tenement, indistinguishable from the other dingy houses crowding about it on the narrow street. The sidewalk before it was broken and uneven and unswept. In the doorway a thin gas light flickered. The fire escapes above were crowded with bedding, babies and cats.

The street was filled with the clamor of radios and squalling infants, and on the warm summer air floated the stale fragrance of a hundred suppers. Steve stopped the cab before the door. He left the engine running and got out.

It was necessary to light a match to read the names on the rusty mail boxes. Three of the bell buttons bore slips of paper on which the legend "out of order" was scrawled. Two bore no name at all. And the others, announcing the residency of Rothstein, Abrimowitz, Hahno and various names of similar insignificance, were of little avail. Steve dropped the match on the cracked oilcloth and stared into the hallway.

Some one came into view, some one emerging from the darker shadows where the staircase rose to other floors. It was a woman. Steve placed himself under the feeble gleam of light from the fixture above, and addressed her:

"Oh, miss! Excuse me; is there anybody here named Caporello!"

She was young. She was well dressed and rather pretty. More than that, she was the kid who had been in Steve's cab the night of that unlucky ride. He had come to the right place.

The girl stood in the hall with a trace of uncertainty in her manner. She stared, not able to see very well in the dim light.

"No. I don't think so. Did you look?"

"Yeah, I looked. A couple of these bells ain't got any name."

"Well, I'm sorry; I don't know."

"Yeah, all right. I'll ask the janitor."

She passed him. He looked after her. Outside, the girl started to walk to the right toward Stanton Street. Then she observed the taxi standing before the door and stopped.

Steve went outside.

"Cab, miss?"

The girl studied him.

"Well, you busy?"

"No, take you anywhere."

"I want to go to three ninety-one West 54th Street."

"O. K.!" said Steve.

THE TAXICAB sped uptown, up the Bowery, Fourth Avenue, across 42nd Street and through the brilliance of Times Square. Many blocks before their destination Steve reached a certain conclusion. On 54th Street he came to a halt several doors beyond the brownstone flat house which bore the desired number. He jumped out and opened the door before the girl was ready to emerge.

"Miss, just a minute. There's something I want to say."

She sat without reply in the interior shadow. She made no attempt to move.

"You ought to know me," said Steve.

"No, I don't."

"Remember that night on Atlantic Avenue last March?"

"Oh!" said the girl.

"You know me now. Well, don't get scared. I don't want nothing from you."

"What were you doing on Rivington Street?" the girl demanded.

In her words was a shade of fierce interest.

"Looking for Goldy Meyer," said Steve.

The girl's hands were in the light shed by a street lamp through the cab window. They were smoothly gloved, and they were gripped together.

"You leave Goldy Meyer alone," said the girl.

"Oh, no I won't. I got something to square with him."

"Nobody can square anything with Goldy."

"Oh, they can't, eh?" said Steve. "Well, I can. Besides, what's it to you if I do?"

"You damn' fool!" the girl said tensely. "Keep out of this. You'll get bumped off if you try anything."

"Kid, listen to me. Lay off the six minute egg stuff. You ain't hard, and I know it. You're scared. Suppose you snap out of it and get together with me right on this."

The girl moved, springing quickly to her feet and forcing herself out of the cab past him. Steve gripped her arm and clung tightly as she attempted to run down the street. None of the listless people on the hot sidewalk paid the least attention to them.

"Let me go!"

Her eyes were wide and frightened. Steve smiled.

"Sure, kid. But why don't you want to talk about Goldy?"

He released her arm quite voluntarily. She studied his face, for the first time visible in the light. She was torn with uncertainty.

"For God's sakes, don't have nothing to do with him," she pleaded. "I'm telling you. I know!"

And suddenly she was gone, half running to evade the pursuit he might make. He remained where he was, beside the open taxi door, until she disappeared down the basement steps of No. 391. There was a wry smile on his face.

STEVE drove the cab around the block slowly. Back on 54th Street he halted on the corner, where grease spots and tire ruts in the soft asphalt told of a casual taxi stand. There he sat his seat and waited. He had time and to spare this evening.

Some minutes later a man came up from the basement of 391. He stood at the top of the steps a moment, looking up and down the street. He saw Steve's cab and slowly lighted a cigaret. The flame was reflected dully in his narrow eyes as he stared. He threw the match away and walked to the corner. For a moment he stood there. Then he approached the taxi and opened the door.

"Run me over to East 64th Street. I'll show you where to stop."

"O. K.," said Steve.

They started. Steve drove professionally, giving no inkling of his awareness that Marginal Street, otherwise known as "the Farm", was just off 64th. The Farm was a waterfront, busy with scows and barges by day, and by night a lonely, dark thoroughfare, shut off from the city by a great rocky cliff on which aloof buildings perched high overhead. It was a nice place for an assignation, either of love or murder.

Up Eighth Avenue Steve drove swiftly, and out on the busy spread of Columbus Circle. There the engine began to gasp and die. They barely made it across the circle, and rolled to the curb with a dead motor. A cop standing in the doorway of an automobile showroom watched them idly. Steve got out and lifted the hood, to the accompaniment of heartfelt curses. Seemingly he could do nothing. He opened the cab door.

"Sorry, but, I'm stuck. Got to drop you here."

The man inside did not move.

"What's the matter, no gas!"

"Plenty of gas," Steve apologized. "Just won't go. I don't know anything about what makes this oilcan go."

"How you going to get out of here?"

"Phone for my service man. And wait here till he comes."

Reluctantly the man came forth. He tossed the cigaret away and eyed the cop standing in the door of the auto showroom. Steve grinned philosophically and snapped the flag on the taximeter back to the upright position.

"You can hail another cab right here, mister. Sorry."

"Yeah," said the man.

He shrugged a shoulder, and walked off. Steve watched him until he saw the man get into another taxi and drive away. Then he returned to the driver's seat. He was smiling to himself. He looked at the choke on the dashboard. It was pulled all the way out. He thrust it in again, stepped on the starter and the engine promptly roared with relieved and eager energy. Steve spoke half aloud as he winked at the cop.

"Well, anyway, I know what will make this oilcan stop!"

The cop grinned amiably, and Steve drove off with a quick, noiseless shifting of gears.

AN HOUR later Steve was following another taxi through the midnight traffic. He had exercised a certain amount of guile on returning to his vigil in 54th Street and, leaving his cab a block away, had stood alone in the shadows across the street from the brownstone house until the girl had finally left the place. She had a man with her, as Steve had half expected, and they had hailed a taxi speeding through the block. Which was also as Steve expected. It was a simple matter to run to his own machine and set out in pursuit.

The chase, in which Steve remained discreetly half a block behind, led over to the dingy breadth of Tenth Avenue and downtown. At 34th Street the cab ahead halted on the corner. The man stepped out. He talked for a moment through the open door, and then closing it, departed alone. The taxi continued on.

At 27th Street it came to a stop again before a plain flat house in a street lined with cheap stores. It was a tough neighborhood and a simple one, a community of hard working older men and of young men undecided between crime and the drab existence of their elders. Here were the homes of great limbed longshoremen, and here the birthplaces of river pirates.

The girl stepped out of the taxi and paid off the driver. He was gone in a second, as if fearing to linger in this unkempt locality. Steve raced to a halt exactly where the other had been, and he was in the doorway of the tenement on the heels of the girl.

"Just a second," he said. "It's me again. We're going to settle this tonight."

She shrank against the half opened door, through which came the wan glow of a hall gas light. A small sound escaped her; her hand made a gesture, perhaps of relief and perhaps of resignation.

"Kid," said Steve, "who are you scared of?"

"Who do you suppose?"

She took off her small felt hat, and black bobbed hair reflected a thin sheen of light. There was weariness in the act, the end of strain.

"You're in right with Goldy, ain't you?" asked Steve. "You ain't afraid of me, certainly."

"What do you know? God, what do you care?"

"Well, I ain't sure. Don't rush me, kid."

"No, I won't rush you. What do you want anyway?"

Steve leaned against the door jamb and lighted a cigaret.

"I want to get Goldy for what happened that night. I'd try to get anybody who did that to me. You ain't fooling me, kid. You ain't in with him in a regular

way. You been playing up to me kind of hard and bad, but you're only scared half to death."

"Oh, I am? Who told you all this?"

"You did."

She stared at him. Before a retort came to her, Steve went on.

"I'm not so slow, babe. Neither am I dumb. I'd dodge you if you was really Meyer's woman. Nobody's going to stick a rod in my ribs and let go, and I'm not going to give them the chance. Now you and me could pull together maybe to advantage."

"Go ahead. I'll listen anyway."

"I'm going to have Goldy arrested for assault and robbery."

There was a moment of silence.

"Don't!" the girl said earnestly. "For God's sakes, I told you you can't get away with that! Don't you understand? You don't count; they'd give you the works in a second."

"All right. What does that mean to you? Does it matter?"

A thin curl came to her red lips.

"Are you making love to me by any chance, mister?"

"Cut that!" said Steve.

He caught at her wrist fiercely. She shrank by instinct as from a blow. He looked at her in the half dark for a moment.

"Jez, you've grown up in a couple of months, kid. You're bad now, ain't you? You're hard. You know everything and you been around and you got a guy who packs a rod and runs a mob. Well, how do you like it? How do you like yourself! Happy?"

There was no reply. Her face was averted.

"You got clothes. More than you ever had, I suppose. Money too, I guess. Jewelry besides, if you used your head. You know where it all comes from, of course. Graft and highjacking and from guys like me who are taken for long rides." Steve shook her. "Well, how do you like yourself now? Come on and tell me."

She was crying, suddenly hiding her face, denying his charges with sobbing words.

"I ain't like that. Honest to God, I ain't that way! I never took a cent off him. I didn't. I didn't!"

In a moment Steve's voice said gently—

"Didn't you, kid?"

She talked then. It seemed she could not hold it in. Everything decent within her broke loose and pleaded to be understood. She told of Goldy Meyer's dominance over her, ruled first by fascination and then by fear. Her home was upstairs. Her parents, humble, bewildered folk, waited there, never knowing now when she might come in, and too awed by their brilliantly pretty daughter to protest. They knew nothing of Goldy. Nor did the honest young men who had grown up in this block and who wished to pay her court. She did not dare call on them for help now that her dashing lover turned out to be a crook and a killer.

Steve stood without moving. He still held her wrist. Her sobs subsided and they stood in silence, obscure in the dimness of the hall.

"Well," said Steve at length, "I ain't surprised, kid. I figured it out that way the first night. I guess that's why it wasn't so easy to forget."

"That was the first time I knew," she said.

"Yeah, so I thought."

"Come on up with me," said the girl on an impulse. "I'll let you in the front room. The folks will wake up, but I'll make them stay in bed. I want to talk to you."

"O. K. with me, kid," said Steve.

THE NEXT morning Steve slept late. And when he rose, he dressed leisurely. He sat on the edge of the bed in his furnished room for half an hour deep in thought before going out to the restaurant on the corner for breakfast. He arrived at the garage about noon. It was a small, dark place on West 64th Street. Once it had been a private stable, and it had been crudely done over to comply with the fire laws. Its patron-

age was given exclusively to cabs which were individually owned.

The proprietor was at the door. He wore greasy jumpers, for he was also the mechanic. He eyed Steve curiously.

"Two guys waiting here a couple of hours for you, Steve," he said.

"Yeah. Who were they?"

"Didn't say. Told me to tell you to wait. They'd be back."

"O. K."

Steve's hack was shiny and clean in a far corner of the empty garage. He took a soft rag and polished the metal work. He aired the tires, filled the tank, wound the taxi meter. Then he went into the tiny office near the door and read the morning paper.

A shadow fell across the floor, and Steve glanced up. There were two young men standing in the doorway, looking at him. They were short, somewhat swarthy, and they did not smile.

"You Steve O'Neill?"

"Yeah."

They continued to study him, carefully.

"Big guy," said one.

"Tough guy, too," said the second.

There was another moment's silence.

"Wise, I bet," said the first.

"Sure," agreed the second.

Steve sat waiting.

"Listen, bozo," said the first, "we called to sell you something. Me and my pal here is salesmen. Ain't we, Angel?"

"Good salesmen," affirmed Angel.

"Now you're supposed to ask us what we're selling, see? instructed the first.

"Well," said Steve, "what is it you're selling?"

"We're selling you a plush lined casket, friend."

Steve came to his feet and carefully folded up the newspaper. He tossed it on the oil stained desk.

"I ain't buying today."

"Oh, yes, you are." Angel beamed thinly. "Ain't he, Johnnie?"

"Plush lined," reminded Johnnie.

"Run and sell your papers. Run and sell your papers. I'm going hacking."

Angel pushed into the room.

"Boy, get us right, and then go hacking. And stick to hacking. You know what we mean, and you're wise enough to know what's good for you."

"And *stick to hacking!*" said Johnnie.

Steve picked up the telephone on the soiled desk. He held the receiver to his ear and, when Central answered, called:

"Spring 3100."

Angel moved, uttering a brief oath. Johnnie stopped him.

"Shut up, Angel! Listen."

In a moment there came over the wire the response.

"This is Police Headquarters."

"Give me Auto Squad . . . I want Detective Nolan."

Nolan came to the phone. Steve announced himself.

"Get this, Nolan. I got two tough eggs here calling on me. They're trying to sell me a casket. Understand? Well, you know what it's all about. In a minute I'm going to walk out with them. There'll be a dozen witnesses to identify them any time you may need them. If anything happens to me you will know where to look up two first class candidates for the hot seat. You get me?"

There came a murmur of agreement over the wire.

"O. K.," said Steve.

He turned to the two swarthy young men.

"Run and sell your papers, boys. Run and sell your papers and leave caskets till you need them."

The two young men went, and Steve escorted them to the door. They were not gone before Steve had introduced them to the grimy proprietor. It was a one-sided affair, but the latter was wise in his generation, and his scrutiny was bent on them with care. The pair walked up the block, silent.

"Jim," said Steve to the garage man, "have you got a rod?"

"Well, yes," said Jim.

"Let's have it for a while."

Jim glanced with curiosity at Steve, but since no explanation was forthcoming,

departed. He went into the office, and when he returned he placed in Steve's hand a .38 automatic. Steve jerked open the chamber, and a cartridge flipped out.

"It's loaded, all right," said Jim.

"Yes, I prefer them that way," agreed Steve.

THE DAY went by without event. Steve pursued the regular routine of his labors, cruising the midtown district. He transported hurried business men with dispatch, crochetty old ladies with finesse, and bubbling parties of debutantes with a certain gallantry. He hailed his acquaintances among the traffic cops on Fifth Avenue, and won a scowl from his pet enemy who guarded a crossing on Park. Two of his fares, one obviously a countryman and the other an ancient female determined not to be cheated, withheld tips in paying him for their rides. But a bootlegger who took his girl friend for a tour of Central Park more than made up with the largess he extended. It was a fair run, for half a day.

Steve was back in the garage at six o'clock. He pulled in, left the car in the center of the floor for the washers, and went to his locker. Jim, the proprietor, withdrew his head from the intricacies of a dismantled engine.

"Oh, Steve! Some woman calling you on the phone."

"Yeah?" said Steve. He threw his cap and gloves into the locker. "Leave any number?"

"No."

The phone rang in the office.

"That's her, I bet," said Jim. "Go and answer it."

It was she. It was the girl.

"Steve! This is Josie."

"Yeah? Hello, kid." Damn' fool, but he liked the name! "What's up?"

"Are you going anywhere tonight?"

"No place special. Why?"

"You're not going to Rossi's?"

"Where?"

"Rossi's," she repeated. "The speakeasy."

"Oh! No, I ain't going there. Why?"

"Steve, they're going to take somebody for a ride tonight. They'll get him at Rossi's. I didn't know who it was when I heard them."

"Think it was me, kid?"

"I was frightened. Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Me, too, babe. Say, do you know what time this will happen?"

"Ten, they said. I can't talk more now."

"All right, Josie. See you next week, maybe sooner. Don't forget our date."

"Next Monday? I won't. Goodby!"

"By, lady!"

For some moments Steve sat in thought before the silent phone. Then he lifted the receiver again. The operator answered.

"Spring 3100," said Steve.

ROSSI'S was well known. It had been on the same block for four years, which is a long time in New York. Not in the same house, for three times it had been padlocked. Rossi had simply moved across the street after each such mishap, and the crowd promptly found him again. He now occupied a very respectable looking stoop house midway between Sixth and Seventh Avenues on 56th Street. Steve knew it well. More than once he had driven a fare to the place, turned his cab in, and rejoined the fare at Rossi's in his dress-up clothes. And inside the place, at the long polished bar, he might very possibly be flanked on one side by a party of young bloods from the Racquet and Tennis Club, and on the other by a trio of not at all obvious gunmen from downtown.

At ten that night Steve was still hacking. He was in the driver's seat of his cab, and within was a passenger. The clock, however, remained flag down, and no earnest ticking signified the steady increase of his day's bookings. The cab was motionless, just short of midway between Sixth and Seventh on 56th Street. The motor spun quietly, waiting for action. Steve was waiting for action. So was the passenger, Detective Nolan. The

street, lined with darkened houses, was still.

A black touring car raced up the block from Seventh Avenue. It coasted past Rossi's door and came to a stop. It was a powerful, eight cylindered car, long of wheelbase and inconspicuous of design. A man climbed out of the rear and stood speaking with some one in the front seat. Then he walked back to Rossi's and, after a brief parley with the gatekeeper, entered.

Nolan spoke from inside the cab.

"I ain't a bit sure, but it looks to me like we're getting under way."

"Yeah," said Steve.

They waited.

The gate in Rossi's basement opened, and a beam of light shone and was extinguished again. Two men came out on the sidewalk. One was the man of the black touring car. The other was a solidly built, square faced man who puffed on a cigar. He listened to what the first was saying.

"Nolan," said Steve, "for heaven's sake, if that's the guy, do something!"

Nolan grunted. He was leaning partly out through the window in back of Steve. Light gleamed dully on the pistol in his hand. Steve slid the lever silently into speed.

The two men in front of Rossi's turned and started walking. They were heading east, and would walk past the black car.

"Jez!" said Steve. "I'm crashing this!"

He released the clutch. The taxi shot forward.

And at that second, from the rear of the black car, came a series of searing jets of flame that split the darkness. The silence that mantled the still, aloof houses was rent with sounds. One of them was the cry of a man in death, the man with the cigar. He staggered backward, driven by the impact of the bullets which struck his solid body, and collapsed heavily against the stone steps of the nearest house. The cigar fell from his lips and rolled idly across the flagstones.

Both cars were instantly racing along the street. On the running board of the big touring car the decoy who had entered Rossi's clung to the side. From the window of the taxicab, Detective Nolan leaned far forward and sent shot after shot streaking at the other automobile.

"Don't let them make it!" he shouted. "Don't let them get away!"

Steve held his foot to the floor board on the gas. His was a six cylinder motor. The other could outdistance him on a straight run. This was no straight run, with traffic and police to encounter, and there was a chance of heading them off. But just a chance.

The touring car swung north on Sixth Avenue, ignoring the traffic lights overhead, and inciting a squealing of many brakes as speeding autos stopped short to avoid collision. Right on its heels the cab raced, swerving around the corner without a pause. A policeman a block away began blowing shrill blasts on his whistle.

Up the wide thoroughfare the two ran, jolting over irregularities in the pavement like hounds streaking over rough country. The two motors roared to an infinity of evolutions neither had known ever before. Speedometers spun dancing needles about the dials, unseen.

"Give it to them!" yelled Steve. "They'll beat me if they reach the park."

North of 59th Street the great winding drives of Central Park offered refuge. No car of the type of Steve's taxi could keep up with the speed that great motor in the black car could attain. Nolan reloaded with two clips of three shots each, and fired on the killers again.

And then they were across 59th Street in a double flash, miraculously swerving out of the way of a lumbering street car which failed to see them, and into the cool, smooth speedways of the park. Westward the car ahead turned, around the wide sweep of the drive, and then north again.

Steve could not gain on it. His throbbing engine was giving its best, and the taxi plunged and fought and the wheel jerked madly in his hands. But his foot

was frozen to the floor, holding the flood of gasoline in the cylinders to the full.

Shots were being returned now. None hit them. It was impossible to aim in a rocking, bucking automobile. O'Neill held his fire, praying out loud for interference to develop somewhere on the road ahead.

At about 72nd Street the West Drive divides itself. A few hundred yards farther it meets again. Traffic normally takes to the right fork, despite a sharp turn the choice necessitates. When the touring car swerved off to the right, Steve was inspired to take a desperate chance. He believed the other driver was heading north in blind flight. It would be possible for him to turn off the West Drive entirely now and head downtown by another road, but unless keen strategy ruled him, he would keep on his northward course. Steve, by taking the left fork, might be able to gain a second and be neck and neck with the other when the two side roads joined.

He cut the wheel to the left and raced up the slight hill away from the direction taken by the black touring.

"WHERE in God's name you going?" shouted Nolan. "They're gone!"

Steve clung to the wheel. The taxi soared over the crest of the gentle slope and flew downward, gaining dizzy speed with the incline. Out they came on the wider expanse where the two roads rejoined. And for one incredible second the black touring car was racing alongside.

"Get them! Get them! Get them!"

Steve was unable to do more than hold the taxi to the road. Nolan emptied his gun into the burst of flame that abruptly opened from the tonneau of the black car. Then he fell back inside the cab.

And the touring car swerved crazily to the right, ripped out a section of iron fence, and turned over with a great crash.

Steve was able to stop the taxi only after a pair of blackened streaks from the tires smoked on the roadway, and the cab, conveniently, had skidded completely about. He shifted to second, and darted back to the wreck. The big car had rolled over a couple of times, and now lay in the grass and brush at the edge of the lake fronting this section of the drive. A lamp post reared near by, casting a pool of light on the scene. The cab stopped beneath it.

Steve jumped out, jerking the borrowed .38 from his pocket. On the cement walk before him lay the body of a man, thrown out of the wreck. He seemed to have suffered a broken neck. Farther lay another man, flung out on his back in the grass. He made no move. But half in the shadows cast by the brush and trees at the lake edge, there was a movement.

"Who's that?" demanded Steve.

He heard a series of curses uttered in an extremity of rage or pain, or perhaps both. A revolver streaked fire in the darkness. Steve sent a shot directly at the spot in return. Then there was silence.

When Steve went into the shadows, a third man lay before him. In his hand was the gun which had fired that last futile and vindictive shot. He was dead, and apparently had remained conscious after the wreck with only a broken leg as the result of it. Helpless and facing inevitable capture, venom had inspired the last act of his life. Steve turned him over. It was Goldy Meyer.

"Well, Goldy," said Steve, "I ain't a bit sorry."

The wail of a siren came from down the drive, where two motorcycle cops, eagerly if a bit tardily, raced to be in on the kill.

It made a great story for the papers. Steve was played up as the heroic hackman. He rather enjoyed it, and saved clippings of all the stories. Detective Nolan was acclaimed as a hero too, when it became certain that the bullet which pierced his lungs was not going to take his life. In addition to his concern over a friend, Steve felt the need of Nolan's survival very much. At the hospital, early that following Monday evening, he explained to the detective.

"I get you, boy," said Nolan, smiling a pale smile. "I can fix it. Her name

won't appear anywhere at all in the case."

"O. K.," said Steve.

He left the hospital. On the street he hailed a taxicab.

"On the button to 27th Street and Tenth Avenue, cowboy. Take the stick off and throw the clock away. You got a rip for the night."

The driver, hand on door, stared. Then he grinned.

"You a hackman, brother?"

"No," said Steve, "I'm a casket salesman. I'm a convention of casket salesmen. Well, are we starting or not?"

The motor roared.

"O. K., brother," said the driver.

Sea Fantasy

by CHARLES GRENVILLE WILSON

I MET him on a cobbled street that reeked of salt and tar;
Nearby there stood a tall white ship, the *Peter*, at her spar,
That tugged impatient to be off and out across the bar.

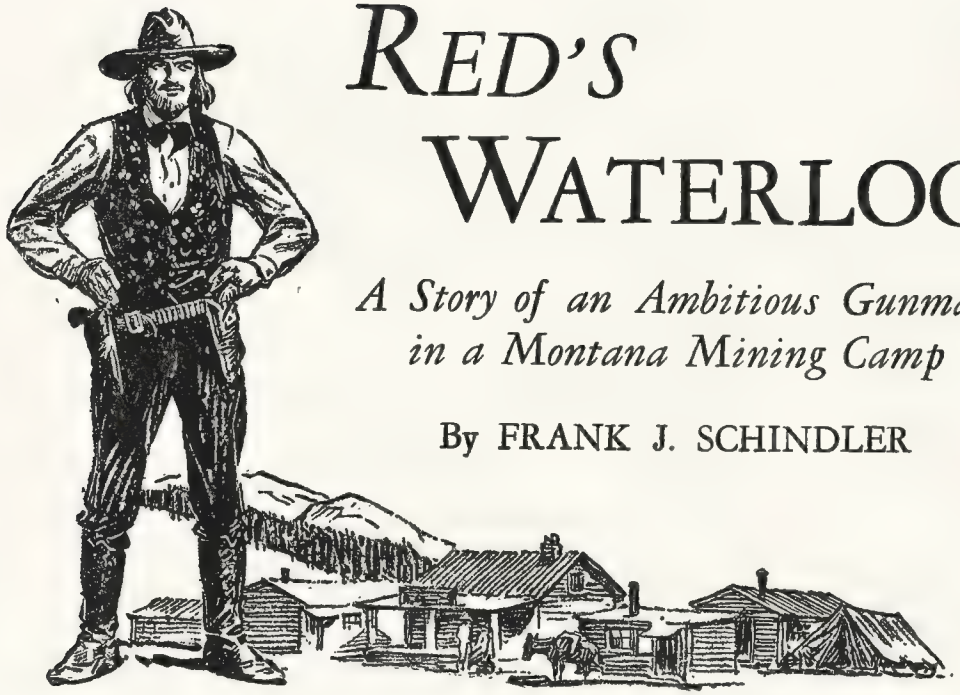
His brickdust face was wrinkled deep from days 'neath windy skies,
And there was that which made me think, when I looked in his eyes,
That here perchance had I found Pan now masked in seaman's guise;
For golden rings were in his ears, a gay cloth round his throat
(I wondered if the seaman's boot hid cloven hoof of goat).
He grinned a happy toothful grin and pointed to the boat.

"Oh come with me, and you shall see the painted tropic lands,
And with the dark eyed maidens walk upon the whispering sands,
And see the moon bind up the sea with glimmering golden bands.
We'll plough atop the emerald waves where sunken cities lie,
Where mermaids fair with seaweed hair, deep hid from azure sky,
Swim lazily down moss green streets unseen by mortal eye.

"We'll see the flaming tropic dawn, the trade wind in our sheets,
And in the sky flamingoes red and jade green parakeets,
And gleaming like a thousand jewels, the flying fish in fleets;
And out beyond the utmost seas, beyond the crimson west
We'll explore the coral atolls, the islands of the blest,
Where moored by silver spider webs the fabled galleons rest.

"We'll pound through timber racking swells and see old Neptune seethe,
And drone before a zephyr breeze a bone between our teeth;
The Southern Cross above the mast, the purple seas beneath.
We'll breathe the odorous spicy air, new washed with flying spume,
Till suddenly where earth meets sky the feathery palm trees loom,
And on the sea worn coral reefs the three decked breakers boom."

He paused for breath; and, looking up, I saw the Evening Star,
But when I turned the man was gone, and in the distance far
A swanlike ship with studded sails was beating cross the bar.



RED'S WATERLOO

A Story of an Ambitious Gunman in a Montana Mining Camp

By FRANK J. SCHINDLER

THIS happened in a booming mining camp of Montana. The long stream of pioneers who fought their way across the plains and mountains ultimately reached California, where their westward progress was barred by the Pacific Ocean. If it hadn't been for the ocean, they would have kept right on trekking to God only knew where. They didn't care.

Among them were many restless individuals who couldn't stay put for any length of time. Some of them turned south and others turned north and soon the wash of these adventurers was headed back east again. They invaded Wyoming and Montana and the Selkirks, and their spades and picks churned up whole valleys.

It was in one of these rich valleys; and it was rough, tough, wild and woolly, with wide open dance halls and gambling hells, and the twin colonels—Colt and Bowie—trying to decrease the population by the gun and knife route and never quite succeeding. Skill with the use of either was an asset, and prizefights were the main indoor and outdoor sports.

These prizefights were no great uplift spectacles such as are put on in New York and Chicago these days, but stand up and knock down, toe to toe slogging affairs, in which the blood flowed like bootleg booze on New Year's Eve. A man who didn't stand up and take it, or who tried to back pedal, so to speak, would have been killed by the customers.

ONE WHO rose to fame as a prizefighter in this boom camp was a young man named Red Graffis. In appearance he was a mild mannered individual, with a big mop of flaming red hair, and his features were covered by a beard of the same color. His hair and beard made him resemble a danger signal. He had arms like rods of steel and a straight armed jab that lifted his opponents off their feet. He had the eyes of an eagle and the quickness of a cat. He would fight just for the love of fighting

or for chalk, marbles or money. He soon became cock of the walk.

His fistic victories made him ambitious to conquer in other fields, so he branched out as a gunman. He was skilled in the use of a gun and boasted of this skillfulness. And so it happened that one Dan Holabird, a professional gunman, took exception to Red's boast. There followed a short and snappy argument, in which a few impolite terms were bandied back and forth, and then they went for their guns. When the smoke cleared away, they carried Dan out, feet first, wrapped him in a wooden kimono, and consigned him to Mother Earth.

Birds of a feather not only flock together but will take up an argument where another left off; so one of Dan's friends went to avenge Dan's death. He was also a shark on the draw, but Red beat him to the draw by the fraction of a second and whittled another notch in his gun butt.

These two victories over experts, you might say, made Red very cocky. He was good and knew it, and said as much to any one who would listen to him. When no man would listen, he voiced his greatness just the same. There were men who said he was bluffing and went out of their way to call his bluff and found that he was as advertised. In fact, they didn't, but their heirs and assigns, if any, did.

Then Red turned into a terror and went out of his way to get battles. All men were afraid of him. He had a murder complex. Just as soon as some new champion gun slinger was heralded, Red would look him up and disapprove all claims to the gun slinger's greatness. He would show the world that this champion or near champion was nothing but a mere palooka, to put it in modern slang.

ONE DAY an old rickety peddler's wagon, with four spavined wheels, and a spindly, spavined nag in the shafts, pulled into the camp. On the seat sat an elderly man with rusty hair, and beside him sat a matron who was his wife. They registered at the hotel. The woman made herself at home and the man went out to sell his wares.

The hills through which they had come were infested with brigands and renegades and people were inquisitive to know how they had come through without being robbed or murdered. Many men in camp were very wealthy and loaded down with gold, but they couldn't move out of camp with it. It was suicide to attempt it. They had gold, but they couldn't get out of the country. The camp was infested with spies; as soon as a man took the courage to move out with his gold hoard, human wolves pounced on him and took it away from him. To all questions the peddler merely shrugged his shoulders and answered that he had had to pot several road agents to get into the camp, but that was what he expected when he decided to open a selling campaign in the camp.

He had a great assortment of things for sale. Razors, strops, belts, pots, pans, and a great collection of new guns. No, he was no Jew. He was a wily Yankee and answered to the name of MacTosh. In order to sell the guns he gave a demonstration of how easily they were aimed and fired. He gave a demonstration of shooting skill which made men gasp. These men recognized an expert when they saw one, and he was a past master at the art of hitting an object at which he aimed—and it is an art.

His name was heralded far and wide and men spoke in admiration of his shooting. This news eventually came to Red's ears. Ah-ha! Another who thought he was good! Red had made a fortune, but he couldn't get out of the country with it, so he lingered on, ever on the watch for some new champion to arise and inject a little excitement into his humdrum days. By this time Red was extremely bad and about as welcome in an assemblage of men as an epidemic of smallpox. However, he didn't lack courage, even if he was bad.

He cleaned and oiled his guns and went in search of the new and great gun slinger. The Pony Express Saloon was thronged

with a great number of men, drinking and at their usual pastimes. Red swaggered in and gazed around the room.

"Red Graffis," went up a murmur.

MacTosh, the peddler, was at the bar, drinking with several men. He had heard of Red's exploits. He took a casual look at Red and went back to his conversation and the drink before him.

Red glared at the men, who gave him plenty of gangway and inquired in an insulting voice whether the wonderful gun slinger was in the place, the one he had heard about as being such an adept with Colt hardware. A man pointed to MacTosh and told him that there was the individual he was seeking.

Red strode over to MacTosh and cracked him between the shoulder blades with his big fist. MacTosh turned and stared at him, hard, his eyes boring into the younger man; and Red gulped.

"So!" exclaimed MacTosh. "This is where I find you!"

The next moment he grasped Red by the back of the neck and tipped him over, reached into an open portmanteau, in which was his stock in trade, grabbed a stout belt and proceeded to knock all the dust from the bosom of Red's pants. Red howled, and MacTosh laid it on heavy. Men stared with open mouthed astonishment at this spectacle of the camp bully getting spanked by an old man.

"So you're Red Graffis, hey!" cried MacTosh, plying the strap. "Ashamed of your own name, hey!" *Whack-whack!* "I try to make a man out of you and you turn out to be a murderer!" *Whack-whack-whack.* "I'll teach you not to pick on your betters, if I have to wear out this darn' strap!" *Whack-whack.* "Get up! You go to the hotel and wait for me! If you're not there, I'll hunt you up and give you double! Now, get the hell out of here! I won't be long! Don't forget, wait at the hotel for me. Somebody else there wants to talk to you! Now git!"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Red, and backed out, a very shamefaced and contrite Red.

"Brother," inquired a man, "how come you handle this tough *hombre* with such ease?"

"Tough *hombre*, hell!" snorted MacTosh. "Why, dammit! I'm his sire! He ran away from home. Thought he was too good to be a peddler. Well, I'll show him I'm a better man than he is. Let's drop it. As I was saying . . ."

EDGAR YOUNG

tells of the lightfooted brotherhood that roams the Latin American trails

TYPICAL TROPICAL TRAMPS

SO FAR as I know the name Typical Tropical Tramps, which rolls so alliteratively off the tongue, was first used by Ed Burk back in the Eighties. There had been men of this type roaming through Latin America for years before that, but it was when an unusually large number of them happened to be in a cantina in Zacapa, Guatemala, that Ed Burk used the expression to classify them.

The name Ed Burk means little to the casual reader of this article, but to a T.T.T. it means much. He was possibly the greatest T.T.T. that ever lived. This is a brash expression, for the clan has had numerous geniuses and brainy men in its ranks at all times.

Ed. Burk was a classical scholar. He spoke ancient Greek and Latin as well as he spoke English. He could converse in Jap, in Chinese, in Hindustani. He was a great *raconteur*. He could start offhand and tell a story that would keep hearers spellbound all night. He could hit trail for a thousand miles on short rations, and when he worked it was as railroad official of one or the other of the native lines.

Once when Ed was general manager of the Guatemala Northern Railroad he got a cablegram that the president and board of directors were coming over from London on a trip of inspection. He had a train with a private car meet the ship at Puerto Barrios and hurry them to Guatemala City. He arranged quarters for them in the best hotel the city afforded.

The next day he took them on a tour of inspection about the general offices and shops and yards. Everything was in excellent shape for a railroad in Central America, but the Englishmen evidently had a different idea in mind, for they found much fault as they went about. That night Ed's one weakness got the upper hand. He got drunk. In the wee small hours he reeled down to the hotel to

serenade the Englishmen. They stood it all right until Ed began on "Ireland Was Old Ireland When England Was A Pup". Some of them appeared on the veranda in their nightgowns and criticized his voice.

"Whadda you expect?" roared Ed. "You think you can get a first class general manager and a nightingale for what you've been paying me?"

The next morning found the visiting officials in a solemn conclave in the general offices. Ed heard about it. He bought the shaggiest burro he could find and rode down. He got off, staggered upstairs and opened the door to the room where the conference was in session. He was greeted with a roar from the president, who told him he had been fired.

In mock sadness Ed stood, staring, then asked whether he would be granted transportation out of the country. Upon receiving a decided negative, he told them that he had figured out that perhaps they would fire him and refuse him transportation, so he had already arranged his transportation and had it outside. He walked to the window and motioned for them to come and look. Curiosity got the better of several of them. They stepped to the window and gaped down at the patient burro.

"That's it," explained Ed, pointing at the donkey.

Some liar says that at this precise moment the burro brayed hoarsely. It is a fact that the quondam general manager rode the burro out of town; although he arrived in San José, Costa Rica, on foot and soon became general manager of the local lines.

He knew railroading from A to Z. Sometimes there was a couple of years between his alcoholic lapses. But he fell off the wagon hard when he did fall.

He met his finish in the jungles of the upper Amazon. He was an official of a railroad construction job and had worked prodigiously. The craving for booze mastered him and he got gloriously drunk. The river was a torrent from recent rains. Native canoes were drawn high on the bank, but Ed managed to launch one unobserved. He was last seen standing in the canoe as it plunged onward toward the falls around which the railroad was being built. There are scores of tales told in the tropics where Americans foregather that have to do with Ed Burk. He was an individual and all of the things he did were unique. This is also characteristic of the T. T. T.'s. No two are alike.

THE GREATEST judge of fiction and the widest read man I ever encountered was a Typical Tropical Tramp. He could repeat the plots and the handling of hundreds of novels and give the names of all the characters. This was the "Cowboy Lawyer", who was neither a cowboy nor a lawyer.

The greatest historian I ever met was a man I fell in with on the trail between Guatemala and Honduras. He was a walking encyclopedia of historical dates and characters. He usually worked as a blacksmith. Napoleon Bonaparte is a living personage to me because this man made him live for night after night when he and I tented together on a construction job.

There are others who stand out. The man who installed the accounting system for the commissary department of the Canal Zone arrived in Panama over the trail. The T.T.T. who walked it with him became the private secretary of the president of Panama. The man who built the Gatun Locks under the direction of Colonel Goethals had hit dozens of trails in Central and South America.

There were scores of Typical Tropicals working on the Canal at all times, in jobs high and low. The T.T.T. holds the job he gets as long as he wants to hold it. It is part of his pride that he can hold any job. I have in mind a man who was train dispatcher in Mexico, a locomotive engineer in Guatemala, a teacher of Spanish in Honduras, auditor of the national railways of Nicaragua, a chef in the Tivoli Hotel in Panama, newspaper reporter in Peru, and who at this time is a popular bull fighter in Guadalajara.

There are thousands of Americans

working south of the Rio Grande. You find them by the hundreds in the oil fields of Colombia and Peru and the copper, tin and silver mines of Peru and Bolivia. Starting at the Mexican line, if you know where to look, you can pick out large and small groups of Americans all through Latin America.

They run railroads, mines and plantations; they are working on big construction jobs. The nitrate desert of northern Chile is sprinkled with operations run by them. There are American sawmills far back in the pine woods of Brazil and Paraguay. There are American packing plants in Argentine and Uruguay that vie with Chicago plants for size. On the Straits of Magellan you will find American dredges working the sands for gold.

It is amazing just how many gringos are down in those countries. And of this vast total only a few are T.T.T.'s. You will find a few of them on every job. Most of them manage to work for a short time on all the jobs. The next job ahead always looks better to a T.T.T. And the getting of the job, the disillusionment and hitting the trail to the next one make him keen and shrewd and gives him a sense of humor. Humor and good fellowship go hand in hand with a Typical Tropical's resourcefulness. The contract men and the officials have a respect and a liking for him. But the closest bonds are between the T.T.T.'s themselves. It is like belonging to a lodge, only ten times more so.

ONE BUTTS up against all sorts of experiences when roaming through the tropics. The yen for hitting trails first took hold of me when I was working on the construction of the S. P. de Mexico when the point of steel was a short distance south of Mazatlan. Queer ducks arrived there by trail from other parts of Mexico. Some came across the mountains from Durango, others came north over the dusty Guadalajara trail. These men had hit other trails in other parts of Latin America and they told about them. The thing sort of got into my blood. One day I blew up and quit.

I hit the trail south and, after various experiences, arrived overland on the construction of the Panama Canal. At times I had walked fast and furiously. At other times I had not walked so fast, for I bogged down to the hips in the swamps. I swam scores of rivers and streams, some of which were crawling with alligators and dotted with moving shark fins.

I walked the beaches and crawled through the jungles. At one stretch I never slept in a bed for seven months. I slept out in snake infested country, for weeks at a time in pouring rain. I weighed one hundred and ninety when I left Mazatlan, Mexico, and I weighed ninety-two on the doctor's scales at Culebra when he examined me. He passed me as physically perfect and then ordered me to the hospital, commenting that if I had crust enough to come there for a physical examination he had crust enough to pass me.

But it is not the big or the tragic things that stick in the mind. The main thing I remember about the whole trip from Mexico is that, when I arrived in Colon and went out on the job and begged an American for the price of a feed, he asked me a hundred questions and then gave me a slick dime to go and fill up on. He was making four hundred dollars a month. After I got to work I found out that I had hit the Zone miser. He could never see the joke of it when I told it on him in crowds.

After I got straightened out and got a stake I started south. I have hit trails in every South American country. The impression in the United States is that these countries are tiny. Brazil is larger than the whole United States and Argentine is a third as large. Peru, Bolivia and Colombia are of vast extent. I made the overland trip from Rio de Janiero to Buenos Aires. I was down south of the Straits of Magellan. Tierra del Fuego is larger than New York State. I have been across the Andes in six different places. I have been at the tiny lake where the Amazon River starts.

I arrived back in Panama City, broke,

and I came near getting beaten up the same day I arrived. It happened that before I left to go south I had won the pay check of a young cable splicer in a crap game. Not needing the money, I gave it back to him. He took it reluctantly and said that if I ever needed money to call on him. I went out on the job and found the gang at work at Pedro Miguel. Not seeing the lad I was looking for, I asked the foreman where he was. The foreman got angry and began to curse me, asking whether I thought I was funny. I answered in kind, and we were on the point of blows when it occurred to me that something was wrong. I told the foreman that I had just arrived in Panama from Guayaquil that morning. The foreman then told me that the lad had killed himself the night before over a love affair with a West Indian woman of Bottle Alley, Colon. He thought that I already knew this and was making a joke of it.

It is little happenings like that that stand out in a man's mind. He gets over the malaria. He finds another girl who eclipses the native señorita of whom he was enamored. He is ready to try almost anything once.

I REMEMBER getting in with a T.T.T. who was a sort of nut on fasting. He was heading through the jungles toward Rio de Janeiro, and we hit the trail together for two weeks. We hardly had anything to eat but bananas and pineapples that grew by the wayside. I kept tightening my belt and hitting trail. We finally got to Rio and landed jobs. We got a room together, and he kept hammering at me with his fasting theory. He wanted to go on a long fast and talked me into trying it with him. Dr. Tanner at the time held the world's record. We beat it by three days. On the forty-first day a beachcomber met us in the park one evening and hit us for a feed. He had not eaten in twenty-four hours and claimed he was starving. We laughed loud and long and the beachcomber gave us a round cursing before he stalked away. After we broke the fast we lost our money in a roulette game and got fired and walked four hundred and eighty miles before we got another. I was never so hungry in my life as I was on that hike.

One time I was stepping out toward a railroad construction job in the Andes. I had been heading toward the place for ten days. A few miles away from the job I met an American negro coming down the trail.

"There ain't no *ding-dong* no moah!" he told me.

It seems that the contractors had run out of money and had had no payday for seven months. A few had remained as long as the grub held out. Now they were out of grub. The negro and I hit the trail from there to Cerro de Pasco.

Coming up through Central America one time I fell in with a fellow who would almost go into hysterics at any sort of joke. It was fun to tell him things and, by contagion, I always got a good laugh too. We stopped one day at a stream in the mountains of Costa Rica to wash our shirts; we did not have a change with us. After soaping them we weighted them with stones and allowed the current to beat them. All at once my companion began to laugh, and he was speechless. I kept asking him what it was. He could not reply in words but finally managed to point down the stream. My blue shirt had whipped free from the stones and was bobbing away on the crests of the waves a hundred yards down the cataract. I never recovered it.

We speak of our big trail hitters and adventurers with a bit of awe. There was Lanky Moore, a great horse of a man who could step trail from dawn to darkness day after day. I was in Sao Paulo, Brazil, when he arrived there, across the unexplored continent from Lake Titicaca. He was in terrible shape from fever, but he had with him raw diamonds to the value of sixty thousands dollars.

I knew two other T.T.T.'s who walked from Rio de Janeiro to Cerro de Pasco, Peru. I knew another who walked from

Cerro de Pasco to Empire on the Canal Zone. When I was on the lower Amazon an American negro stalked into my camp with the ham of an Indian across his shoulder. He was the last of a party of thirty men who went across the Andes and headed east from Ecuador. He had been in the jungles for several years and had turned cannibal. On the Straits of Magellan I met a sourdough who had walked all the way overland from Dawson City. He had a foolish idea to build a cabin on the Straits and spend the rest of his days panning gold from the sands and fishing. The climate was too raw to suit him and he started walking back. This man is at this very moment working on a railroad construction job in Honduras.

MANY of the T.T.T.'s make good in some way or other. Jim Brown formed a partnership with Mr. Penny and they built railroads and bridges all over Central America. The T.T.T.'s would go to the mat for Jim, and he was strong for them. Only a few years ago he came to New Orleans to see a T.T.T. who was sick in a hospital. He gave a quart of his blood for a transfusion and sent money regularly to pay the patient's expenses until he passed away. Lee Christmas died in the same hospital a few years later. Lee was not a T.T.T. but the boys liked him. He always had a score of them in whatever army he commanded. I served as an officer for him myself. I was also lieutenant in the Brazilian navy. Do not ask me any technical questions. I got by with the job.

I have worked for eighteen dollars a month and boarded myself, and I have drawn down a thousand per and expenses. I quit the latter job as readily as I did the former when the spirit moved me. The great affair for ten checkered years was to hustle along. I am a bit proud of the title Typical Tropical Tramp.

Yes, I am proud of it. It is a great clan, and I am a member of it in good standing. The trails educated me and polished me up a bit. I was raised on a little farm in the Virginia mountains and had not seen a train until I was eight years old. My father had to turn loose his horses and hold me when I saw it.

And it gives me a tremendous kick to see any of the boys making good. The majority of us die off or drop out of sight. I know a score who started on some crazy trip or other and never came back. Yellowjack and bubonic claimed others. Many died fighting for their $125 a month in a revolution that meant nothing to them.

If the history of the T.T.T.'s could be written each chapter would throb with interest. But it never will be written. Some of us know just a few dabs we have heard here and there. The T.T.T. carries no notebook or camera. He hits trails between jobs. He goes prospecting for gold and diamonds. He wants to find out whether there is a buried city in some unknown spot and he goes to see. There is scarcely a portion of Latin America that has not been crossed by T.T.T.'s at one time or other. Much of this territory is marked on maps as unexplored.

There is a movie actor out in Hollywood who is one of us. I know a mayor who was once a T.T.T. I can name a score who have made good in smaller ways. We never talk about such things when we happen to meet. It would run something like this:

"Did you hit the high or the low trail from Mexico to Guatemala? Yeah, those Tehauntepec women are jake! I hiked the beach trail from Port Limon to Old Harbor and then took the jungle trail across to the Sexola! Sure, I worked in Cerro and Chukey! Remember old Grandpa Brown? He's up there and he can't come down, for his heart has swelled! Iguana meat! You bet I eat it; wish I had a piece now!"

So it is a brotherhood, a society, and you can not belong unless you know the ropes. There is no bluffing your way through. It can not be done. The T.T.T. will call you in an instant when you "bobble". And if you do belong, the T.T.T. will go all the way for you.

DERELICT

A powerful story of the ocean steamships and the heroic mettle of the sea masters

THE CRIMSON of the dawn had toned down to opal and mother-of-pearl pink, a clear sky and a translucent sea, smooth and oily and still. Already the day was hot.

Captain Elphick, in striped pajamas, Panama hat and loose slippers climbed the ladder to the upper bridge.

"Good morning, sir," said the mate.

"Well, Mr. Cooper, what did you want me for?"

"Thought you'd better have a look at her, sir."

Captain Elphick, not yet thoroughly awake, scowled.

"Look at what?"

And then he saw the steamer on the starboard bow and moved slowly across to the starboard wing of the bridge.

"Why, she's got no way on her," he said.

He rested his elbows on the wooden rail and stared through the prismatic binoculars the mate handed him. When he had adjusted the focus and the steamer ahead was brought close within his range of vision he clucked his tongue.

"I can't see a soul on board."

"That's why I called you, sir."

Captain Elphick was astounded.

Here, in the track of the *Sassandra*, bound from Colombo to Freemantle, pounding away at a steady nine knots an hour, was a steamer, apparently sound, apparently abandoned. He lowered his glasses and passed his hand across his eyes.

"Mr. Cooper," he said, "you know what this means?"

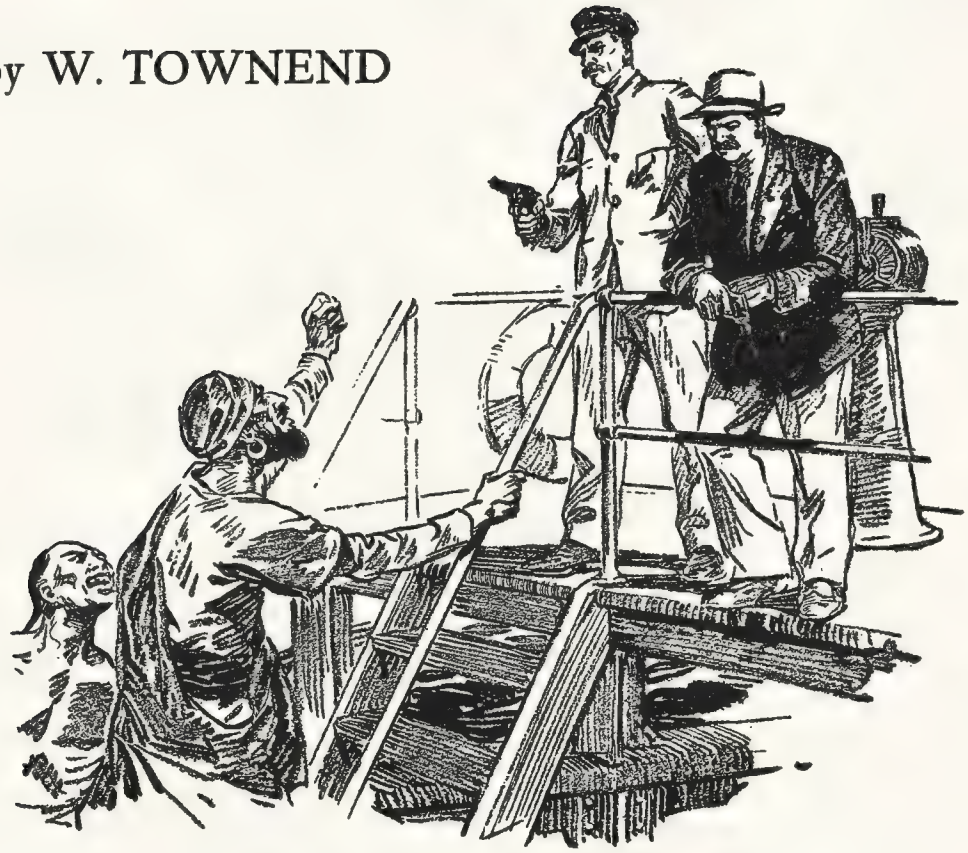
"Salvage, sir."

Captain Elphick uttered a husky laugh.

"Salvage! Abandoned, and with a cargo."

"Must have been in that blow we heard of over the wire—less eight days ago," said Mr. Cooper.

By W. TOWNEND



"They took to the boats, thinking they were going to sink!"

The mate pushed his uniform cap with the shabby white cover to the back of his head.

"But the boats are still there, sir!"

Again Captain Elphick raised the glasses to his eyes.

"She has her boats, yes." Then he swore softly between his teeth. "But she hasn't! Mister, there's one of the small boats missing. Over on the port side."

"That makes it queerer still," said the mate.

The captain, searching the decks through the binoculars, spelled out the name on the bow.

"*Makara*," he said. "Wonder where she comes from."

He tried, more or less idly, to calculate how much the salvage would amount to and what his share would be of the court's award, supposing the *Makara's* cargo to be sugar, say, or sugar and tobacco and spice and coffee. His years of penury were at an end at last. Affluence had come to him, or, if not affluence, sufficient to make retirement possible. He would leave the sea and he and his wife would settle down in the country and buy a farm.

"Mr. Cooper," he said briskly, "get CS hoisted. And if we get no answer, we'll have to send over a boat and board her. First of all, better sound that whistle."

The mate tugged at the lanyard above his head.

Deafened to all lesser sounds by the deep roar of the *Sassandra's* whistle, Captain Elphick turned.

"That'll do, Mr. Cooper. Get CS hoisted."

"Very good, sir," said the mate. "CS."

The captain waited on the bridge, still leaning in a slouching attitude over the starboard rail, inert, passive. Though to all outward appearance he was drowsy and somnolent, a torpid fat man without either energy or capacity for sustained action, his mind was once again busy, speculating wildly on the mystery of the silent derelict before him. The rays of the sun scorched through the canvas awning above his head. The steady throb of the engines, audible even on the bridge, became an echo of the slow beating of his heart. Rivulets of sweat trickled sluggishly down his bare chest under the loose pajama jacket. The smell of hot oil and tar and paint oppressed him.

He sighed and glanced forward and saw that the watch below had gathered under the awning on the forecastle head. He glanced at the bridge deck beneath where he stood and saw the second and third mates and the chief engineer and the third engineer and the fourth, talking in a group, clad in singlets and trousers. A little distance away, near the door of the galley, he saw the cook and the steward, the carpenter and the donkeyman.

"There's no answer, sir," said the mate, climbing the ladder. "Sparks has been trying to get them, too, sir. There's no one on board!"

"No, Mr. Cooper, there's no one on board."

The captain moved away from the wing of the bridge and rang the engineroom telegraph to *slow*. The engineroom clanged its answer.

The best of the engines slackened and he smiled.

"It's what we all dream about, Mr. Cooper; a prematurely abandoned vessel with no one on board. What's more, mister, if you want a mystery of the sea, it's here!"

He rang the telegraph to *stop*. Again there was the clang of the engineroom's acknowledgment of the signal.

"Mr. Cooper, you'll take the No. 1 lifeboat, if you please."

"Very good, sir."

The captain gazed across the narrow space of oily, green sea between the two steamers.

"Where's the second mate?" he said. "Oh, there you are! Mr. Harkness, go for'ard with the carpenter and a couple of hands and get that big hemp hawser out of the forepeak. Mr. Cooper, tell the third mate to take charge of the bridge a minute. I'm going to get some clothes on."

He was about to enter his room on the lower bridge when the chief engineer climbed the ladder from the bridge deck.

"Morning, Mr. MacCall."

"Mornin', sir." The chief engineer, a small, wiry Scotsman, grinned. "Salvage?"

"Mac, all being well, this means I'll be able to leave the sea."

Mr. MacCall's wizened face twitched. He shook his head.

"It would tak' mair than salvage to mak' you leave the sea, Captain Elphick."

"Mr. MacCall, if I'd the money, do you think I'd be fool enough to waste my life, skipper of an old tramp, for wages?"

"Captain Elphick, if you'd the money, dae ye ken what ye'd dae? Ye'd buy an auld tramp fer yersel' an' gang traipsin' aroon' the warl', on the bridge o' yer ain vessel."

"Rubbish," said Captain Elphick. "Mac, you're wrong."

Nevertheless, although he laughed, he wondered.

MR. COOPER, standing in the stern of the *Sassandra's* lifeboat, his right hand grasping the tiller, gazed anxiously up at the derelict's top bridge and wheelhouse and the captain's room on the lower bridge. He wished, if possible, to discover why the *Makara*

had been abandoned before he boarded her, but he could discern no apparent damage, either to hull or superstructure. She floated, tranquil and silent, in that setting of green, glassy sea and clear blue sky and brilliant tropic sunshine, unpainted, streaked with red rust, ugly, yet having, to his mind at least, a strange and lonely beauty.

"Out with that boathook, Parry," he said. "We're going alongside."

And then while Parry was shipping his oar, Barnes, one of the men, rose to his feet and pointed toward the *Makara*.

"Look at that, sir. Amidships, by the fiddley."

"Sit down, you fool." The mate was annoyed. "Look at what?"

"The rails, sir. D'you see, sir?"

Mr. Cooper saw the dark brown stains on the topmost rails and for an instant was chilled, as if cold storm clouds had obscured the sun and the temperature had dropped from the nineties to the thirties.

"There's been murder done aboard this ship, sir."

"That's blood, sir," said the boatswain.

"Well, what if it is!" snapped Mr. Cooper. "Haven't you fatheads ever seen blood before? Paddle a few strokes; we'll go on board."

Mr. Cooper glanced toward the *Makara's* lower bridge and received the greatest shock he had had in all his thirty years.

High up above the lifeboat, where an instant before he had seen the closed door of the captain's room, there now stood a tall, lean man in dirty white ducks, staring down at them, a kind of dazed and sick horror in his gaunt, brown face.

The men had begun to pull slowly toward the ship, ignorant of what Mr. Cooper alone had yet seen. He cleared his throat and spoke.

"Hold hard, you fellows. Way enough."

They rested on their oars and gazed at him, bewilderment in their eyes. He said—

"There's some one there!"

And immediately, without comment, all of them turned their heads to look.

The man on the lower bridge smiled coldly, and spoke—

"And now you can pull back to your own ship."

"Don't you want any help?" said Mr. Cooper.

"No, I don't."

"We can't leave you like this."

"Why can't you?"

"Looks to me as though you were sick, or something. Who are you? Why hasn't your ship got steam up?"

"Mister, you mind your own business. Clear out!"

He drew an old fashioned Army revolver from his hip pocket and folded his arms on the rail.

"You're broken down," said Mr. Cooper. "We're going to take you in tow."

"In tow!" The lean, brown man broke into weak laughter. "That's good. Salvage, eh? Listen, mister; we'll get into port when we want to, under our own steam, not yours. It's like your damned impertinence to come talking of tows."

He was no longer looking down at the men in the lifeboat but had turned and was staring, stiffly, it seemed, aft. An expression of wild and incredulous anger crossed his face. He swore, "That damned nigger!" and made a dash for the ladder that led to the bridge deck.

Amazed, Mr. Cooper and the five men in the *Sassandra's* lifeboat turned their heads and saw a black man, stripped to the waist, run from the galley amidships abaft the funnel to the rail.

He waved his arms above his head and screeched:

"Help! Fo' heaven's sake, suh! Cap'n's done kill us all!"

The tall, gaunt man was running along the deck, revolver in hand, lurching a little from side to side, as if not quite sure of his feet.

The black man vaulted the rail and leaped feet first into the water and swam to the lifeboat.

Parry, the man in the bow, hauled him on board.

"Back, starboard; pull, port. Look alive, you," said Mr. Cooper.

As the lifeboat turned the gaunt man called out:

"Haven't you ever come across a steamer with her engines stopped because of a breakdown? When we're ready we'll be off on our course again. That nigger's the damnedest liar I ever knew."

The black man was crouching in the bow, his eyes round with fear.

"No, suh, I speak the trufe. Cap'n, suh, he's gone mad. Yas, suh, it's the trufe. He's been killin' us, he has. Some of us, suh, he's gotten locked up, he has. Yas, suh, that's the trufe, sho's I'm heah, suh."

The gaunt, brown man laughed.

"He's no good, that nigger. Don't come back. I won't let you on board. I'll shoot."

IN THE *Sassandra's* saloon, the black man told his story.

"Cap'n, he go mad, suh. Takes his gun, suh, an' shoot. Th'ee, fo' men, he shoot. Yas, suh."

He nodded his head rapidly, as if to contradict in advance any possible doubts that might arise.

"An' nen, suh, the others, he take'm an' put 'em whar they cain't give no trouble. Don't matter none to him, suh, if they gwine live or die. Gittin' use' to daid men abo'hd ol' *Makara*, suh; bad 'nough when fellers fo'ard in the focsle, suh, stahts ketchin' that ol' feveh, an' dyin' o' that, but tain' in reason we-all's gwine stan' fo' no hahd case cap'n, suh, shootin' up his crew fo' no reason atall, suh, is we?"

Captain Elphick, seated in the swivel chair at the head of the table, said sharply—

"What kind of fever?"

"Java feveh, suh."

The captain sighed.

"Thought maybe it was yellowjack or plague. Java fever—that's malaria, isn't it? Malaria's nothing, not these days."

The chief engineer shook his head.

"Java fever's bad enough, Captain, ony time. I wudna gang so far as to say it was malaria, quite, but it's bad."

"Yas, suh," said the black man. "I figgers it is. We had five-six men die o' that, suh. Ol' cap'n, suh, he got it, too, got it bad, sho' 'nough; but didn' make no diff'ence to him no how."

"What is the captain's name?" said Captain Elphick.

"Richardson, suh, Cap'n Richardson."

"Whaur do ye come frae? What port?" said the chief.

"Sourabaya, an' a heap mo' places. Cahgo o' sugah. Dunno whar we's gwine. Noo Yawk, I thinks, pusson'lly. That's why I done crave make the v'yage —to git back home."

"You American?" asked the second engineer.

"Uh-huh. Yas, suh, boss. Home town's Poht Ahthur, suh, Texas."

"What was your job on board the *Makara*?" asked Mr. Cooper.

"Cook, suh. Guess I'm jus' about as good a cook's you'd find, suh, an' if you got sich a thing as a job fo' me, suh, abo'hd this ship, in the galley, I'd suttinly give satisfaction, suh."

"Pay attention to me," said Captain Elphick. "I want to be certain you're speaking the truth."

"Sho' is, suh. Wouldn't do nawthin' else, suh. Ol' Cap'n Richardson, suh, he done sign me on fo' cook. Yas, suh, an' afteh them other fellers git themselves killed, suh, jus' fo' askin' him would he make fo' neares' poht, on accoun' the feveh an' the ol' hurricane an' bein' sho't handed, an' the rest of 'em was put away in the focsle, suh, he come roun' to galley an' say, 'Evans, you's the one individual abo'hd this ship I can trust. You ca'hy on wif the cookin' an' when we gits into poht I'll see you don' be no loser.'

"Nother thing is, suh, if any other ship come up, he wants I should be on deck, him an' me, suh, an' p'etend the rest of the crew's down the engineroom, suh, wo'kin' wif engineers, suh, hahd's ever can, repairin' breakdown. So, if any questions gwine be ask, why ol' *Makara* ain' movin', there's c'rect answers all ready.

I done tell ol' Cap'n Richardson, suh, I's agreeable, an' jus' now, suh, when I watch you comin' I made sho' ol' Cap'n would haul me out on deck, same's he said. But he didn' come neah me. An' so I didn' move fum galley, till I seen yo' lifeboat 'longside an' couldn' hol' out no longer. I come out on deck an' jump oveh rail, suh, shark or no shark, an' swim fo' boat. Tha's the trufe, suh, sho's I'm stan' in' heah!"

"If the prisoners are in the focsle," said the second engineer, "why didn't they hear our whistle and make some kind of noise to attract our attention?"

"They jus' couldn', that's why. Ol' Cap'n Richardson, suh, done move them fellers yes'day, suh, down aft into the poop. This mornin', suh, soon's he sighted this ship, suh, he went aft an' put them down afteh peek, suh, out the way, whar they couldn' heah nawthin'." The black man grinned uneasily. "Guess them guys is feelin' the heat right now, suh."

The captain took his white silk handkerchief out of his sleeve and mopped his forehead.

"Putting aside the question of salvage, it's our duty to do all we can to help those poor devils on board the *Makara*."

"You try an' go abo'hd, suh, an' see how quick he draw that ol' gun o' his," said the black man.

"I don't like to ask any of my crew to run the risk of being killed," said Captain Elphick.

"My idea is," said Mr. Cooper, "to take the *Makara's* cook back with us in the lifeboat."

A startled exclamation broke from the lips of the black man.

"Says which, suh?"

"We'll tell Captain Richardson we're going to hand you over."

"Ol' Cap'n Richardson's sho' gwine do some shootin' on me, suh, soon's he gits me abo'hd, suh!"

"We won't let him have you. We'd use you as a kind of bait, just."

"Bait gits swallered often 'nough, an' ol' fish goes free."

"What's all this leading up to, Mr. Cooper?" said the captain.

"While I'm arguing with the captain of the *Makara* on one side of the ship, the No. 2 lifeboat under Mr. Harkness must come alongside the other. If they go about it the right way, Mr. Harkness and a couple of hands ought to be able to tackle him from behind and throw him and tie him before he knows they're on board."

"That's quite a sound scheme, Mr. Cooper," said the captain. "It's practicable, at least. Mr. Harkness, though, can't go. I'll take the No. 2 lifeboat myself." He rose to his feet. "What beats me is why Captain Richardson didn't take more pains nothing went wrong with his plans. If he was going to pretend he'd had an engineroom breakdown and have himself and the cook on deck, why the deuce didn't he do it?"

"Beats me, too," said Mr. Cooper. "If Evans hadn't come out of the galley and yelled to us, we'd have left him and pulled back to our own ship."

"Why not let me take the No. 1 lifeboat?" suggested Mr. Harkness. "Mr. Cooper hasn't had his breakfast."

"Think I'd miss that trip for the sake of breakfast?" said Mr. Cooper. "Not for fifty breakfasts, I wouldn't!"

ONCE again the lifeboat lay within speaking distance of the *Makara*. The five men who had been rowing rested on their oars. The black man, his bare back glistening in the rays of the sun, sat in the bow, hunched up, arms folded on his knees, a look of misery in his face.

Mr. Cooper hailed the silent ship.

"*Makara*, ahoy!"

The gaunt, brown man opened the door of the room on the lower bridge.

"Captain, we've brought you your cook."

"You can keep him. I'm through."

"Captain Richardson, this man's either said too much or not enough."

"He's a born liar."

"He said every one on board was dead but you."

The gaunt man looked startled.

"Aye," he said presently, "they're dead."

"Then you can't stay on board by yourself. Let's take you in tow."

"I'll see you damned! Keep away."

"Don't monkey about with that gun, for heaven's sake, Captain!" said Mr. Cooper. "We're friends, not enemies, and we want to help you."

"Come any nearer and I'll shoot!"

"Captain Richardson—that is your name, isn't it?—suppose you fall ill, or get heavy weather. You're drifting. What can you do with a ship this size single handed? Anyway, here's what I want to ask you: This man, Evans, says he's sorry now he ever left you. It isn't right you should be alone. Wouldn't you like to take him back to cook for you?"

The black man in the bow turned toward Mr. Cooper and muttered under his breath, a gray tinge visible in the black of his face, his eyes bulging.

The captain of the *Makara* stared moodily down at the boat.

"I don't understand," he said, "but I'll take him back."

"May we come a bit nearer, then, Captain?"

"You may. But I give notice, I'll shoot if you play any tricks."

"If it comes to giving notice, Captain, I give you notice, once the shooting begins it's a criminal case ashore."

"Put that man aboard, mister, and then clear off to your own ship."

Mr. Cooper nodded to the men in the boat.

"Give way there. Gently."

Captain Richardson descended the ladder and stood on the bridge deck by the rails.

"In bow," said Mr. Cooper. "Way enough."

As he maneuvered the lifeboat alongside the rusty hull, he listened for the sound of oars and wondered what he should do if anything had gone wrong with their plans.

"Boat oars," he said. "Look sharp, there!"

Evans, the black man, began to to clamber over the thwarts past the men who were shipping their oars.

"Look heah, suh, somepin' wrong. I'se not gwine abo'hd that man's ship, suh! Golly, Mister Mate, what's got you? I didn' say nawthin' you said I did say!"

"Stay where you are, you idiot."

Evans was trying to force his way by the boatswain. Barnes caught him by the shoulder.

"Mister Mate," he said, "tell 'em to stop! They's hurtin' me. Mister Mate, tain' no use you puttin' me abo'hd old *Makara;* won' jus' stay put. Mister Mate, listen—"

THE LIFEBOAT rocked from side to side as they scuffled.

"You'll get a slam on the jaw in a minute," said the boatswain.

Mr. Cooper glanced at the *Makara's* captain who stood, revolver in hand, in an attitude of strained attention, his head turned toward the saloon deckhouse.

Clearly in the stillness there came to the men in the *Sassandra's* lifeboat the creaking of rowlocks.

The captain of the *Makara* hurried away and Mr. Cooper gave a series of breathless orders in a low voice:

"Parry, hang on with that boathook! Bosun, gimme a leg up, then climb up after me. You, too, Barnes, and you, Hodgson. Parry, stay where you are. Benson, catch hold of the tiller."

There was a moment of tense, scrambling activity in the lifeboat, and then Mr. Cooper, hoisted up by the boatswain's arms, hauled himself on board the *Makara.* He climbed the rails and stood on the bridge deck.

Barnes and Hodgson, between them, lifted the boatswain.

"Make haste," Mr. Cooper whispered. "Make haste."

As he leaned over the rail and caught hold of the boatswain's wrists he heard an angry voice from the port side of the bridge deck.

"D'you want a bullet through you, you

in the stern, or what? If your men pull another stroke, I'll shoot!"

Mr. Cooper moved away from the rails, followed by the boatswain. Swift footsteps approached. They waited, their backs against the side of the saloon deckhouse.

The captain of the *Makara* came hurrying around the corner. Mr. Cooper clenched his fists and put all his strength into a fierce uppercut with his right. The captain of the *Makara* dropped to the deck. Mr. Cooper stooped and wrenched the revolver from the lean, clawlike hand.

"That's done it," he said.

He grinned; but, studying the gaunt features and the thin, emaciated frame of the man stretched on the rusty steel plates, he felt a sudden twinge of shame. Not even the thought of the revolver comforted him.

"I'd better tie him," said the boatswain.

The captain of the *Makara* opened his eyes, stared blankly at Mr. Cooper and then struggled into a sitting position.

"So you got me, did you?" he said and put his hands to his head.

Captain Elphick, a wide, plump figure in his white ducks, now smeared with streaks of rust, his Panama hat well on the back of his head, stood between the corner of the saloon deckhouse and the No. 3 hatch.

The gaunt man seated on the deck said:

"Are you captain of that ship yonder? Tell these maniacs not to tie me, will you? I'm not going to fight."

Mr. Cooper caught sight of the second engineer.

"Trust you, Mr. Phelps," he said. "You'd have been in this, if you'd had to swim, I bet."

"Chief sent me to have a look at the engineroom."

The captain of the *Makara* hugged his knees.

"Seems to me it's a pretty high handed action boarding another ship like this! That's something you'll have to explain at the Court of Inquiry."

"If it comes to explaining things," said Captain Elphick, "you needn't wait for any Court of Inquiry. There are one or two things about this ship of yours, Captain, that look pretty damn' queer!"

"They wouldn't have looked queer if it hadn't been for Evans jumping the rail, though."

"Well, where's your crew?" said Captain Elphick.

"That fool cook's been talking, of course," said the captain of the *Makara*. "Here, one of you, help me up."

The second engineer caught hold of his hands and pulled him to his feet.

"Hodgson," said Mr. Cooper, "fetch that darky aboard. Tell him he won't be hurt."

Captain Elphick said rather sharply:

"Captain Richardson, I asked you a question just now which you haven't answered. That cook of yours tells me you've got the survivors of your crew imprisoned in the after peak. If that's the case, it's my duty to release 'em and ask 'em some questions."

"Finished!" said the captain of the *Makara*. "Done in the blooming eye! And no one to blame but me." He twisted his lean face into a grin. "Carry on, Captain, the cook was right. The crew—what's left of the swine—are down the after peak. Go and let 'em loose, Captain, and may you be happy ever after. Go and sing hymns if you like, anything, so long as you don't expect me to join you. I'm through."

Captain Elphick, worried by the strangeness of the encounter with the gaunt, brown captain of the *Makara*, moved to the rail and stared across the narrow space of water at the *Sassandra*, with her black and green funnel, and gray hull, and yellow ventilators and masts, and the white deckhouses and bridges and canvas awnings, and the brasswork, sparkling in the sunshine. An old sailing ship man himself, Captain Elphick could, even so, appreciate the spectacle of the *Sassandra*, serene and graceful, floating on the green and oily sea under the deep blue sky. A sudden longing to be back on board of her, away from the *Makara* and the dejected, sick looking man whose secrets he

must uncover, gave a note of asperity to his voice.

"Captain Richardson, your cook tells us you shot some of your crew."

The black man shuddered.

"Fo'law's, Cap'n, you ain' gwine believe what ev'hy feller ses, are you? Honest, Cap'n, didn' say nawthin' 'bout you shootin' no one."

He dropped to his knees and wriggled toward the two captains.

"Get back!" said the captain of the *Makara*. "You're not responsible, any more than any one else on board the damned ship." He turned to Captain Elphick. "Let's get on with it. You'd better see the crew and judge for yourself."

ON THE poop deck under the canvas awning, Captain Elphick and the captain of the *Makara*, Mr. Cooper, the boatswain, three deck hands and two firemen and Evans, the *Makara's* cook, were grouped about the hatch.

The captain of the *Makara* leaned over the coaming.

"Bosun," he said, "get those beauties up out of the after peak and send 'em on deck."

"All of 'em?"

"Every mother's son of 'em! The captain of the *Sassandra* wants to hear if they've any complaints."

"Oh, he does, does he? He's due for some fun."

The captain of the *Makara* stepped back from the hatch coaming and stood by the quadrant.

"That's my bosun down there. They started scrapping among themselves after the lifeboat took Evans off. He had to soothe 'em and keep 'em from killing each other." He laughed. "You'll agree with me when you see them he was wasting his time and—"

What else he might have said was lost in a wild tumult of voices from the after peak, screeching and howling more after the manner of wild animals than human beings.

The uproar died down suddenly.

Eight naked, lean and angry yellow men came tumbling up the ladder, one after the other, chattering and jostling.

They saw the *Makara's* captain by the quadrant, arms folded across his chest, and stared at him in silence, as if awed by his presence. And then they broke into shrill yells and advanced, shaking their fists.

He did not move, not even when a hand clawed at the front of his dirty white duck jacket.

Mr. Cooper hit the man who had touched him and knocked him down—a sinewy, narrow shouldered Arab with a hooked nose and wearing no garments but a dirty turban.

"Get back!" said Mr. Cooper. "Right back."

Another man, Mongolian in type, tried to slip past him. He thrust out his leg and tripped him.

"A pretty sight, 'pon my Sam," he said. "Not even clothes would make 'em human, either."

The remaining six men made no further attempt to attack, but contented themselves with screaming threats and curses.

"So these are the men you've held as prisoners," said Captain Elphick.

"You've seen 'em," said the captain of the *Makara*. "And you take their part, of course. You would. I could tell it as soon as I set eyes on you. My experience is, Captain, it doesn't matter how much in the wrong a gang of cutthroats like these may be, there'll always be some damn' pious humbug to take their side against his own countrymen."

A broad, elderly man, clad in a singlet and loose khaki trousers and white shoes and a limp Chinese straw hat, stepped over the coaming of the hatchway on to the deck. His left hand was swathed in blood stained bandages. In his right he held a revolver.

He stood for a moment, watching the scene before him, with his small eyes half closed and his wrinkled face grim and angry. He plunged through the crowd, elbowing the yellow, naked men roughly aside.

"What's the game, eh?" he said. "What's it mean?"

"It means, Bosun, they've released the prisoners, that's all."

"Gawd 'elp us! You'd be surprised, wouldn't yer?"

"Hand over that gun!"

Mr. Cooper pressed the muzzle of the revolver he had taken from the captain of the *Makara* against the boatswain's stomach.

"Do as you're told, Bosun. I've got the drop on you."

One of the men who had been in the after peak wore a pair of trousers. On his head was a battered uniform cap with a broken peak. His pinched and sallow face with its dark, close set eyes and small black mustache expressed despair and resentment. He said in a whining, singsong voice:

"What for 'im shoot? What for 'im make fella stop down allee time after peak? Damn' hot! What for, hey? One time shootee, one time heat him sufflocate. Allee same, him. Cap'n Lich'son, we put you in plison. Savvy, Cap'n Lich'son?" He turned to Captain Elphick and waved his skinny arms. "What for 'im makee fella sufflocate after peak?"

The captain of the *Makara* grunted.

"Having a pair of trousers on makes him the spokesman, naturally. I've known men go to Parliament on less, anyway."

"What for 'im makee fella sufflocate after peak, hey?"

"To give you a taste o' what you'll 'ave after you're 'anged, same as you will be some day," said the *Makara's* boatswain.

"Captain Richardson," said Captain Elphick, "I'm willing to allow things, maybe, aren't what they appear to be, but what I've got to find out is, what's become of the rest of your crew. The darky here says you killed them. Anything to say?"

"Lord, Captain! You couldn't imagine how much if you tried. Evans, you liar, why couldn't you keep your mouth shut?"

"Honest, suh, didn' say nawthin'; just got scairt, suh."

The sound of footsteps on the after well deck made the men on the poop turn their heads. The second engineer of the *Sassandra* ran up the ladder. He spoke to Captain Elphick.

"I've found their chief engineer. He's sick and wounded."

"Why didn't you say you had your chief engineer on board?" said Captain Elphick.

"Why didn't I say a lot of things?" said the captain of the *Makara*. "I might have told you my family history, but I didn't. You didn't ask, to begin with. If you'll allow my bosun to have his gun back so he can keep these heathen under control, I think we'd better go to my room and I'll try and explain." He hesitated. "No need to put them down the after peak again, Bose." He turned to Captain Elphick. "I had 'em there so they couldn't signal you."

EVEN with the three doors and all the ports wide open, the captain's sitting room on the lower bridge of the *Makara* was suffocatingly hot.

Captain Elphick sat in a cane chair and panted. Mr. Cooper and Mr. Phelps, the second engineer, lounged in opposite corners of the room. The captain of the *Makara* leaned against his flat topped writing desk, his arms folded, his face composed, to all appearance quite unmoved by the temperature.

And on the red plush settee lay the chief engineer of the *Makara*, Mr. Elliott, an elderly man with a gray beard and mustache, and bright blue eyes that peered sharply from under deep, protruding brows. He wore pajamas. His left shoulder was bandages, he carried his left arm in a sling, but was able, so he explained, to use his hand.

"I'm a stout man by nature, Captain," he had said, "but look at me now. It's the heat and the Java fever."

"It was the fever began it," said Captain Richardson. "And then we got caught by the fringe of that typhoon

last week. Eight days ago, isn't it?"

"Eight years," said the chief engineer. "I was a stout man once, Captain—but I said that, didn't I?"

"What port did you come from?" said Captain Elphick.

"Sourabaya. We part loaded our cargo there, and completed at Samarang, Pekalongan and Cheribou. We're bound for New York. I ought to explain, though, that we'd been lying up at Sourabaya for months."

"Didn't I read something about the *Makara* last year, some smash or other?" said the second engineer.

The ghost of a smile crossed the gaunt, brown face.

"A smash? Lord, yes! We cut into a Dutchman. The finding of the court was, we were responsible. The right finding, too. I'm not pretending it wasn't. Four men were drowned and half a dozen injured, and the *Makara*—Lord, if you'd seen her bow plates you'd have understood! There's been a curse on the ship ever since.

"Nothing's gone right. Today's a sample. Captain, I put it to you, as man to man, d'you think you'd ever have guessed there was trouble on board, if our plans hadn't miscarried? I'd arranged, you understand, to have the chief engineer and the bosun and Evans on deck, for camouflage. Then if any one asked what was wrong and why were we stopped we'd say the rest of the hands were below in the engineroom, working under the engineers, helping to repair a broken thrust shaft; we needed no help, and so on."

"And why didn't you do as you'd planned, then?" said Captain Elphick.

"Being a philosopher, Captain, it's no use my blaming any one, even myself. It wasn't dawn when I happened to see your lights. I roused up the bosun and we went aft and got the eight men down into the after peak. They put up a scrap, of course, and I hurt my head. I would, naturally. I left the bosun aft with orders to batten down the hatch as soon as you came near enough to hear any of the prisoners screeching. There was no reason to stifle 'em in that heat beforehand. I'm not cruel by nature, though I've reason to be. I told the bosun I'd be back as soon as I'd seen the chief.

"Well I saw him. And I saw him asleep, for the first time for a week. That was enough. I didn't wake him. I went to my room to change into a clean uniform. I sat on my settee and tried to think. Was there anything I'd forgotten? My head began to go round and round. The fever was getting me once more. I remember trying to stand on my feet and going down on my knees, and then I remember nothing more till I came to myself and heard the sound of oars alongside and knew that you'd put a boat over and I'd forgotten the bosun and Evans and Lord knows what." He turned suddenly to the chief engineer. "Mr. Elliott, how long were we in Sourabaya?"

"Nine months," said the gray bearded man on the settee. "Nine forsaken, weary months. Mosquitoes, heat, mist, miasma, fever."

"Nine months, yes," said the captain of the *Makara*. "Quite so. Good place, Sourabaya, if you've money enough to go ashore, up along the canal into the town, whenever you want to, but to stay by the ship and sweat, that's different! The crew vanished. Some asked to be paid off; some went on the beach. Three of them went to prison for stealing, and are there yet. One was drowned, coming on board, drunk. No one knew when we could get away; no one cared—except ourselves, of course."

He broke off abruptly.

"Captain," he said, and he seemed embarrassed and no longer sure of himself. "Captain, wouldn't you like a peg? I've some whisky and even if we've no ice, the water's tolerably cool out of a *chatti*."

Captain Elphick sighed and shook his head.

"A little later, perhaps, with pleasure, if—"

"If I clear myself from the charge of butchering a blameless crew, eh?"

THE CAPTAIN of the *Makara* smiled and went on talking:

"Not so blameless, either. Ever signed on a crew at Sourabaya? It's an experience. Jailbirds and thieves and beachcombers the Dutch wanted to get rid of. You've had a chance to see some of them, Captain, but you've not seen the worst—they're dead! There were only three Europeans signed on beside the carpenter and the bosun—two Englishmen and a Scotsman, the scum of the earth. The wireless operator was just out of hospital. He wasn't properly fit but he said if we wouldn't take him he'd die. So we took him and he died on board instead of on shore.

"Well, Captain, by the time we left Cheribou, we knew what kind of a voyage we might expect. At Samarang two of the firemen skipped and the fourth engineer went off to visit a lady friend and never came back. The third mate had died at Pekalong the day we got there. Ran out on deck in the sun, shouted out something about going home and pitched over the rail on to a lighter and broke his neck. He'd been drinking himself to death for months before he joined us. Man of thirty-five, too, with a master's ticket!"

"That so?" said Captain Elphick. "There's always something wrong with a man when he reaches that age and you find him going third or second with a master's ticket. Bound to be. What's more, if you make inquiries, you'll learn nine time out of ten, drink's at the bottom of it."

"You're perfectly right, Captain, of course." The captain of the *Makara* nodded. "After the third mate died, I made up my mind we'd continue the voyage with two mates only, and when the fourth engineer deserted, the chief here told me he wanted no more experiments, either. He'd manage with the second and third and the donkeyman.

"And then, Captain, the day after we passed through Sunda Strait it came on to blow. There wasn't a man for'ard worth his grub. Hopeless, the lot of 'em. How we managed to keep from broaching to and being swamped, Lord knows. But we did. The hatches held, the engines kept turning; but we lost the third engineer. He'd been standing his watch in the engineroom, half dead with fever, and at eight bells he went on deck for a breath of fresh air. That's what we thought, anyway. He opened the door of the engineroom alleyway, the weather side, and was washed overboard.

"After the typhoon, fever. By way of variety, I suppose. I was down; so was the second mate; so was the chief here; so was the Chinese steward, so was the messroom lad—Chinese, too—and so was Sparks. The bosun and carpenter both had it; so had the three white deck hands. Pleasant, wasn't it? Sparks was the first to die. We stopped the engines and buried him the same evening.

"Next day—and I hope you don't think I'm piling it on, Captain—next day the main steam pipe burst. That it, chief?"

"Aye, starboard main steam pipe fractured close to the flange attached to the b'iler stop valve. A bad fracture, too, due to vibration of the engines. One of the firemen died of his scalds. The only trustworthy one we had, o' course."

"And now," said the captain of the *Makara*, "now, Captain, I'd just like you to take this log book and refer to it as we go along. When we got under way, after the pipe was repaired and the fireman buried, a deputation of focsle hands, led by a halfcaste fireman, Gonzales, half Mexican, half Chink, and Reyes, his mate, a Filipino, came up to the lower bridge here and ordered me to turn back to Java! They didn't intend to finish the voyage—it wasn't safe. I up off the settee where I was lying and told them to get to hell out of it! Gonzales argued and I knocked him down. After that I went about armed. So did the master and Mr. Elliott.

"Simpson, one of the white deck hands, had a relapse and died next afternoon. We buried him just as we'd buried Sparks. Afternoon, same day, the firemen and sailors, not on watch, fought. One of the firemen,

an Arab, had his leg broken. We set the leg and bedded him down under the awning on the focsle head. At about eight o'clock that same night Mr. Elliott here came to the bridge and told me the second engineer had been found on the platform in the engineroom, dead. No evidence, of couse. An accident. Gonzales and Reyes and the trimmer all swore not one of them was out of the stokehold the whole watch till just on seven bells. Gonzales had heard a thud and had gone into the engineroom to see what it was."

The chief engineer, sitting upright now on the settee, said:

"The swine had murdered the Second, naturally. They thought if the third mate could die of a broken neck and no questions asked, so could he. Only one engineer left alive, and the donkeyman. And I didn't trust the donkeyman far, I'm telling you."

"THE DONKEYMAN was one of the men in the after peak," said the captain. "He was the merchant who wore the pair of trousers and talked about having me sent to clink. Part Armenian, part Chinese, part English, with all the bad features of each race and not one of the good ones, such as they are.

"Anyway, as you'll see in the log book, Captain, the second engineer was found dead in the engine room at about half past seven. At nine o'clock the Arab fireman who'd been smashed up in the fight died. At half past the second mate went. Heat, not fever. Fell asleep and didn't wake. At eight bells, midnight, the crew mutinied!

"You'll find some Chinese who won't touch a corpse for anything under the face of heaven. The steward was different. He was sewing the second engineer's body up in canvas when Gonzales and Reyes and the rest of 'em came into the port side engineroom alleyway. They shot him three times and he died on the engineroom gratings."

"That was when they were on their way to visit me." said the chief engineer. "I heard the shooting."

"They shot the chief here through the shoulder and left him for dead!"

"I shammed," said the chief placidly.

"They shot the messroom steward because he wouldn't join them. One of the firemen was killed for the same reason. He was Chinese too. Evans, the darky, would have been killed, if they'd found him, but he'd heard the shooting and hidden himself on top of the galley, abaft the funnel.

"The bosun who was in his bunk came out on deck. Reyes shot him in the wrist. The mate who'd been on the bridge got Reyes down and tried to throttle him. Gonzales shot at him and killed him.

"I was asleep, doped with quinine, when the bosun woke me. It was pitch dark. The crew had taken charge of the ship, stopped the engines, dynamo, everything. I jumped out of bed, grabbed my gun from under the pillow and opened the starboard side door.

"The moon was full. I saw Gonzales on the lower bridge and shouted for him to put up his hands—it's there in the log book, Captain, initialed by the bosun—He refused and shot at me and missed. I shot back and killed him. Reyes rushed. I killed him too. There was no fight left in the crowd after that. I drove 'em for-'ard, deck hands, firemen and donkeyman, and shut them up in the firemen's focsle. Sounds damned heroic, but it wasn't. I've driven sheep.

"I'd like you to bear in mind how things were on board the *Makara*. I was alive but sick. The two mates were dead. The chief was alive but wounded. The second and third engineers were dead. The two stewards were dead. The bosun was alive but wounded. Sparks was dead. Evans was alive, but so scared he was good for nothing. The Arab fireman who'd broken his leg was dead. The fireman who'd been scalded was dead. The fireman who'd taken the messroom steward's part was dead. Gonzales and Reyes were dead. The white deck hand, Simpson, was dead. The carpenter and the other white men I couldn't find. I thought they'd been killed till I saw one of the two working boats—

the gig—was missing and knew they'd deserted the ship.

"And I'd shut up in the focsle the donkeyman, three deck hands and four firemen, all Asiatics. Now, Captain, what about it? Why not go back to your own ship and let's manage our own affairs without any more interference. Be a sport! I killed those men, Reyes and Gonzales, but I am no more a murderer than if I'd killed a couple of rats in the lazaret. Now, am I?"

CAPTAIN ELPHICK was troubled. "Suppose I leave you on board your ship, drifting—do you imagine you'll make port, unaided?"

The captain of the *Makara* smiled grimly.

"I should damn' well say I do imagine it."

"With one engineer, a bosun, a cook, and eight Asiatics who've tried to kill you? That's madness!"

"Captain, those men will be ready to work tomorrow, if not tonight. I'm on top and they know it. Captain, I've got the chief engineer and the donkeyman for the engineroom. I've got the bosun and myself for the bridge. We'll share the watches between us. I'll navigate. There'll be three deck hands for the wheel and so on, and four firemen for the stokehold. I'll take the *Makara* into Colombo, better still to Aden or Suez, with the survivors of the crew that left Sourabaya.

"We can do it. We must! No one's going to get any salvage out of the *Makara!* That's putting it bluntly, isn't it? But I mean it. What would the owners say? Another black mark against me and I'm down and out for keeps. No, Captain, it's up to me to show if I'm given a command I'm not quite hopeless."

Captain Elphick shifted his weight uneasily in his chair.

"And you really think, Captain Richardson, the owners would hold you responsible for the trouble with the crew and blame you for accepting our offer to tow? I don't see it. After all, they kept you on after the collision with the Dutchman, didn't they?"

"I had nothing to do with the collision with the Dutchman, Captain! I'm innocent of that, anyway."

"Weren't you captain of the *Makara*, then?"

"No, sir, not a bit of it; third mate."

There was another tense moment of silence. Then the captain of the *Makara* went on talking in a low voice.

"Captain Weir who commanded the *Makara* was recalled to England. The mate followed him a few weeks after to take over another ship. The second mate got permission from the owners to go as mate in one of another company's ships. I was left in charge till another captain could come out. No other captain did come out, and I had word to take the *Makara* to New York as captain, on probation, as it were. Perhaps I ought to explain, Captain, I'm the man who commanded the *Hazleton*."

"The *Hazleton!*" said Mr. Cooper sharply. "The ship that went on the rocks near Mizen Head!"

"I commanded the *Hazleton*."

Captain Elphick understood at last.

"You've had a bad time of it, Captain," he said.

"A bad time?" said the captain of the *Makara*. "Well, I suppose if you come to think of it, I have. Fourteen months from home, an old ship, overdue for her survey, twenty-six days across the Western Ocean—blowing a living gale most of the time from the nor'west—hove to for days, and not a sight of the sun for a week. We hadn't wireless bearings to help us, then, Captain. Dead reckoning only! I'd not had my clothes off for eight days; I'd had no sleep for four when we struck.

"The mate was drowned. The second mate drank and I'd warned the swine he needn't expect I'd take him another voyage. He lied. Said I was drunk and incapable and in my bunk when I ought to have been on the bridge. The bosun lied too. The second engineer—Lord knows what grievance he had—lied as

well. They took my ticket away for twelve months and ruined me.

"Now, listen, Captain; no one would give me a job. I tried for mate. I tried for second mate. I tried for third. And then, after eighteen months on the beach, I met a marine superintendent who'd been mate of the ship I'd served my time in, as a boy. He believed in me, in spite of the evidence, and got me away as bosun. Me, with an extra master's ticket! I was bosun two years and then I went as third on the *Makara*.

"Well, Captain, I've been third mate for two years. A damn' good Third, too, if I may say so. Now I'm captain, on probation. Suppose I make port, with a crew of eleven. The owners will say, 'That old crock, Richardson, isn't the washout we'd been led to believe.' The super will feel he did right in keeping me on. I'll have earned promotion. But, suppose, just suppose, Captain, you take us in tow. Towed into port, helpless, mutiny on board, survivors of crew in irons. They'll say at home, 'Ah-hah! Old Richardson at it again! He was the blighter who got tanked and piled the old *Hazleton* up on the shore and drowned twenty-one out of a crew of thirty-four.'

"If that happens, Captain, I'd be finished. Think of the lies those swine aft would tell of me. And suppose the carpenter and the other two white men get ashore. What lies will they tell to save themselves? Their word's as good as mine, if I'm down and out, isn't it? Captain, I'm fighting for dear life; I ask you to give me a chance."

"Will the hands obey you?" said Captain Elphick briskly.

The Captain replied sharply—

"They daren't do anything else."

"Got all you need? Coal, oil, water, stores?"

"Everything. And the cargo. Don't forget the cargo—sugar at its present price."

Elphick smiled at the lone Skipper.

"The underwriters ought to be pleased, anyway."

CAPTAIN ELPHICK pressed his hands against the arms of his chair and helped himself to his feet. He straightened his back and squared his shoulders and then gazed at the captain of the *Makara* as if he saw him properly for the first time.

"Captain Richardson," he said gruffly, "I said just now no man who had a master's ticket but was only a third mate was any good. I ask your pardon."

"Hell! That's nothing. True, usually, too."

They shook hands awkwardly.

"Proud to have met you, Captain," said Captain Elphick. "Damn' proud! And now what about those drinks?"

The captain of the *Makara* put a bottle of whisky, five glasses and an earthenware *chatti* on the flat topped desk.

"Captain," he said, "any objection to your bosun and the hands who came across in the boats having a tot?"

"Not in the least," said Captain Elphick.

The captain of the *Makara* went to the starboard door.

"Evans," he called, "come here."

The black man appeared in the doorway.

"Yas, suh," he said, "you done call me, suh?"

"I want you to serve out a tot all round to those men from the *Sassandra*. You and the bosun are in on it, too."

"Yas, suh, thank you, suh; much obliged."

"Oh, and Evans—you'd like to go to the *Sassandra*?"

"Me, Cap'n?" The black man rolled his eyes and looked astounded. "Me, suh? Guess I'm man 'nough to wanna stay wif me own ship, suh! I ani' gwine desert you, Cap'n. No, suh. How you get 'em meals cooked, suh, wi'out ol' Evans? 'Tain' in reason I'd wanna go, suh. Not till we reach Noo Yawk, suh. Guess I sees this v'yage through, Cap'n, same as you an' the chief heah."

He withdrew, muttering.

"Always did say that coon was cracked," said the chief.

CAPTAIN ELPHICK stood in the starboard wing of the top bridge. He was tired and a little sad. He came to the conclusion presently that he envied the captain of the *Makara* as much as any man he had ever met.

The *Sassandra* was moving off on her course again, headed for Freemantle. The *Makara*, giving no sign of the tragedies her decks had witnessed, rust stained and ugly, floated motionless on the green and oily sea.

The ensign at her stern, hoisted since the lifeboats had left, dipped.

Captain Elphick was pleased.

"She's dipping," he said. "Where's our flag?"

"The third mate's aft, sir," said Mr. Cooper. "He's answering."

A roll of bunting rose to the *Makara's* foremast head and broke into the Blue Peter.

"Blessed if he isn't getting away today," said Captain Elphick. "Quick work, eh?"

"The crowd must have given in, after all, sir," said Mr. Cooper.

"As soon as we went on board they were whipped," said Captain Elphick.

He saw the chief engineer gazing up at him from the lower bridge and beckoned.

"Well, Mr. MacCall," he said, when he stood by his side, "well!"

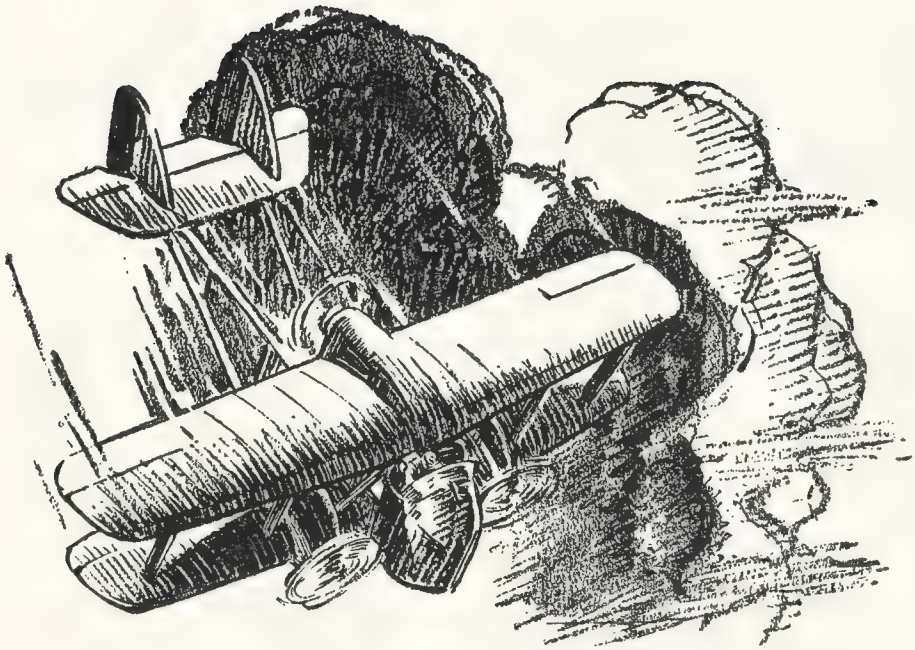
"Weel, Captain Elphick," said the chief. He lowered his voice. "Whaur's oor salvage the noo?"

"Who said anything about salvage?"

"You did! An' you'd leave the sea as soon as ye cud."

"Leave the sea!" said Captain Elphick. "Leave the sea, Mac! I'd be a pretty poor kind of fish if I swallowed the anchor, wouldn't I? What would I want to leave the sea for?"

The chief engineer laughed.



The Test Flight

A Tense Little Tale of the Army Pilots

By THOMSON BURTIS

LIEUTENANT REX CARSON bounded blithely up the long flight of steps that led to the flying office. The door was open, and he stopped as his gaze rested on his captain, Lars Walbergh, big, blond and imperturbable.

The chief test pilot of the Army Air Service was seated at his desk. He was as motionless as the furniture itself, and he was staring moodily through the windows at the panorama of McCook Field.

The foremost airplane laboratory in the world was seething with activity. Drawn up on the line before a continuous row of white hangars were more than two dozen varieties of aircraft. They ranged from a neat little single seater, powered by a three cylinder motor, to the forty ton Barling bomber, with its six Liberties. Hordes of mechanics, civilian and military, were working like ants. Some of these ships had never been flown. Others were being used to try out new theories in flying equipment—from motors set upside down to reversible propellers.

It was the look on Captain Walbergh's tanned face that caused his assistant to pause for a moment and scrutinize him curiously. That square countenance was usually serious, but now it was really haggard. The chief was in one of his fits of brooding—and they had been frequent of late.

Carson walked in the door.

"Wheuh's the funeral, Chief?" he asked

casually in his smooth Mississippi drawl.

Walbergh came out of his trance, and a slow smile made his face light up warmly.

"I was just wondering whether there wouldn't be one tomorrow," he replied.

"Still worrying about that Cannonball crate?" Carson inquired as he glanced momentarily at a shining new plane lording it over the line.

The young Southerner intended to be facetious, but when he met Walbergh's eyes he became serious.

The captain nodded, staring at his desk.

"I hopped her around the field again this morning," he said. His speech was slow always, but now it was more deliberate than ever. "I don't like that baby, Rex. She isn't just right. I've got a hunch she'll be hell to handle in the air."

"Oh, be yourself!" Carson advised lightly. "Why should she be? Great guns, she's been sand tested, redesigned, hung in the wind tunnel and everything else for about six months."

"I know, but she don't feel right," Walbergh insisted stubbornly.

The Cannonball was powered by three Liberties—two tractors and a pusher. The only time it had ever been even five feet off the ground had been during Walbergh's preliminary flight tests.

For a moment the tall, dark, young flyer was silent, but his mind was busy. Would the chief be sore if he said something? There was eight years' difference in their ages, but they had been very close during the last year of duty together. Carson liked to think that there was a real bond of affection between them.

He turned away from the window and leaned down over the desk impulsively.

"Don't get riled, Chief," he drawled, "but listen. You haven't got youah wind up ovah taking the Cannonball in the aiuh tomorruh, have you?"

Walbergh hesitated. He ran one hand slowly through his shock of coarse blond hair.

"I'll swear I don't know, Rex. I've got a hunch she isn't right!"

"If anybody could tell, you'd be the guy," Carson told him. "But you'ah wrong this time, Chief. She must be all right. Know what I think?"

"What?"

"You'ah ovuhflown, Lars. I've noticed it befoah. I know you like a book. This last month you've been doing the hahdest kind of flying, about fouah houahs a day—one wreck, two forced 'chute jumps, and all the rest of it. They've been wohking you to death, just because theuh's nobody else to campaiah with you—"

"Oh, can that!"

"It's so and you know it. Theuh isn't a big ship pilot in the country that can get within a mile of you, but that's no reason why you've got to do all the testing around this dump! Listen, Lars."

He hesitated again for a moment and then drawled eagerly:

"You've got the wind up a little ovuh this Cannonball. A hunch just because you'ah jumpy. Why not let me test her tomorruh?"

The huge captain stared at him. His steady blue eyes seemed to be looking through his young assistant, seeing visions.

"Don't get me wrong, Chief!" Carson went on hurriedly. "Maybe that sounded crazy. I'm not saying I could test it like you could. Gosh, you've taught me all I know. But you'ah stale—"

"Maybe so," Walbergh agreed wearily. "I guess it's just a fool hunch—maybe my nerve's gone and I need a layoff."

For a moment he gazed through the windows at the big new ship which was being made ready for a flight that might make aviation history. The Cannonball was designed to carry a lot of weight, make close to two hundred miles an hour and reach a ceiling of twenty-five thousand feet. The king of the big ships—if it was right.

Suddenly the chief shifted his gaze to the eager face of his subordinate.

"You can do it, big boy," he said deliberately. "and if you'd like to, go ahead!"

"Attaboy!" Carson chuckled exultantly. "I'll go tell the C.O., eh?"

WALBERGH nodded, and Rex hurried from the office. He'd be the first man in the world to try out the new plane. Half of the high rankers of the Air Service would be on from Washington to watch the performance, and Dayton would turn out more than its usual quota of spectators, too. Airplane engineers from all over the country were already on the ground. It would be a real occasion.

"I must call up Molly and get her set to come out," he thought happily.

He did not sleep very well that night, and got up bright and early to get a look at the morning paper. There the story was, on the front page. He glowed with pride as he read one paragraph over and over:

> The test flight will be made by Lieutenant Rex Carson, for the past year assistant to Captain Lars Walbergh, Chief Test Pilot. Lieutenant Carson is considered one of the most brilliant young pilots in the service, and for the past six months has been specializing on big ships under the tutelage of his famous chief.

Molly Thomas was ready promptly at nine o'clock, for a wonder. The flight was scheduled for ten.

"Did you see this?" she asked as she took a clipping from her pocket book.

"Uh-huh," he nodded with careful unconcern.

She was slim and eager and vividly alive, and her pride in him was infinitely pleasant. He drove into the confines of McCook Field like a conqueror. Already the line was packed with automobiles, but he found a place for his own.

"Sit here, beautiful, until the takeoff," he told her. "I'll be back before I go up—"

"Here comes Captain Walbergh," she interrupted.

Walbergh was walking toward them slowly, eyes on the ground and heavy shoulders hunched forward. His blond hair was tossing in the breeze, and his square face was somewhat drawn, Rex thought. He looked as if he had had a bad night.

He forgot Lars temporarily, however, as he became aware of the fact that people were pointing him out to each other. The Cannonball, sleek and shining in its brand new paint, divided attention with its prospective pilot.

"Hello, Chief!" Rex hailed him blithely. "Everything set?"

Walbergh nodded unsmilingly.

"Morning, Miss Thomas," he greeted Molly; then, abruptly, "Rex, I'm taking her up myself."

"What?"

Carson's mouth fell open, and an instant later his brown eyes were flaming.

"I'm taking her up myself," Walbergh repeated doggedly. His heavy jaw was thrust forward. "I got to thinking it over—"

"Oh you did, did you! When you saw the crowd that was out you decided to be the center of the stage, did you? I—"

"Not that," Walbergh said carefully, as though feeling for words. "I'm sorry, Rex. But don't you see—it's my job, and—"

"No, by God, I don't see! What do you mean it's youah job? It's mine, and I'm going to—"

"Don't you see I—I couldn't let you go up feeling the way I do. It's up to me."

The young Southerner's savage disappointment erupted in a volcano of hot words which showered on the inarticulate old man.

"You'ah a hell of a friend!" Rex finally flung at him. "Making a fool out of me this way."

Walbergh turned away.

"I'm sorry," was all he said as he lumbered toward the gigantic ship.

CARSON walked back of the line of cars. He wanted to find a place to hide with his fury and humiliation but his turbulent eyes never left Walbergh as the latter put on his parachute and climbed up into the cockpit that jutted out from the wings. There was one four hundred and fifty horsepower Liberty set on each bottom wing, and the pusher was directly behind the

pilot. One by one the mighty twelve cylinder engines bellowed into life.

Every eye was on the pilot as he bent his helmeted head over the instrument board. Mechanics squatted on the three ruddered tail surfaces, backs bent to the propeller wash. A general and his staff were close by, watching, and a group of experts were conversing near the right wing. All along the line thousands of spectators were wondering why Walbergh was making the flight, thought Carson bitterly. There were tears of hurt pride and shamed disappointment in his eyes as he watched the great plane taxi slowly toward the eastern edge of the field. He could not bear to rejoin Molly Thomas. He felt as if he could never see her again.

His face was flushed and sullen as he heard the motors roar along, wide open. The Cannonball rushed across the field and took the air smoothly. Mechanics and pilots were buzzing elatedly as they noted the speed at which ten tons of linen and wood and steel were being dragged through the air. Carson's eyes never left it as it became a speck in the sky.

Finally Walbergh turned back. Soon he was droning over the field, four thousand feet high and going higher in sweeping circles.

"Hell, anybody could fly it!" Rex thought furiously. "What a grandstand play that was!"

Subconsciously he noticed that the ship seemed to go into a bank very slowly and heavily. Probably that was Walbergh's careful flying. He could fly—damn him!

It was gaining altitude. It must be eight thousand feet high, he estimated. Now the chief was putting it into a tight bank, almost a vertical one—

"Good God! He's spinning it!"

For a second Rex stared at the sky. Was Walbergh actually spinning that ship?

"It went into a spin out of that bank, I'll bet a million!"

Seven turns, ten, fifteen—it had come down a full two thousand feet. He heard the roar of the motors die, and suddenly resume again. But the ship was still whirling earthward.

Carson found himself walking swiftly to the line, where excited flyers were talking with many gestures.

"He can't get her out!" Rex was thinking dazedly. "He tried it without the motor, now with it on . . ."

His mind stopped functioning for a moment as he saw the Cannonball gradually stop revolving. It was but four thousand feet high, now hurtling downward in a steep dive. Slowly the nose came up.

"In it again!"

The Cannonball had dropped off into another spin. Carson was with the other pilots now.

"She's nose heavy, and goes into a spin easy and won't come out!" yelled an expert. "Why don't he jump?"

"Don't want to wreck the ship," Rex found himself saying. "He'll fight her down as long as there's a chance to save her."

He knew Lars so well that he felt he could accurately repeat every thought in the chief's mind right then. His resentment burned away in the fire of that ordeal and he suddenly realized what Lars had been driving at before the flight.

"God, why don't he jump!" Carson groaned. "It's too late now!"

The Cannonball, spinning very slowly, was less than a thousand feet high. Women were crying, and white faced officers were ordering the ambulances to crank up and the mechanics to get out on the field.

Motors on, motors off—Rex could see Lars, now, fighting his battle to the last. Now he had the ship in a straight dive, seven hundred feet high. The nose came up with maddening slowness. It was directly over the center of the field. The motors roared into life as the ship started to level off.

"He'll have to bank or crash into buildings," Carson exploded. "There he goes —God! O great God Almighty!"

It was a prayer as he saw the Cannon-

ball start into its last deadly spin. Then he found himself one of a mob of men, rushing across the field behind the ambulances.

REX DID not falter as the Cannonball hit the ground. The left wings took part of the shock, the cockpit the rest. Walbergh's body, crushed, went limp as the huge plane bounced into the air and crashed again. The hideous bedlam of splintering wood and rasping metal and tearing linen was suddenly obliterated by an explosion which seemed to rock the earth. Carson staggered as a solid mass of flame sprang from the débris, and hid it.

It settled almost instantly to a big bonfire, playing over the heap of twisted wreckage.

"Carson! Where are you going? You can't do anything—"

He was fighting madly in the arms of two men beside him.

"Let me go, damn you! I can get him—"

"That's all right, boy, nobody can do anything for him now. Be quiet, and pull yourself together."

He slumped in their arms, his body shaken by dry sobs. Some one stood between him and the wreck.

"A hell of a friend" he'd called Walbergh. God, what a friend!

UNDER THE DESERT

By

JOHN ALCORN

BEFORE the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, the gods of Greece and Macedonia fled to the Nile valley seeking rest and recreation in the pantheon of beast headed deities. After Alexander's conquest, the tramp of northern feet, the rattle and clank of northern swords and shields disturbed the three thousand year old somnolence of Egypt's gods, from the delta to the very sanctuaries of Ammon at Thebes, six hundred miles south.

Under the Macedonian dynasty the slow, white winged feluccas bearing cargoes up and down the river were policed by the hard, white figures of the men from over the sea. The sleepy donkeys bungling through the streets were quickened and ordered. The sword of the Ptolemies carved new hieroglyphies in the law codes of dead Pharaohs; the drip of revenues from the fields and markets increased to a flow and the tide of trade swelled in volume. For both gods and men the peace of the valley fled before the confusion.

Far out from the Nile, two hundred miles over the tawny lion backs of the Libyan desert, lay several rich oases. It was to these that the powerful men of Egypt came, creating pleasure resorts, places of idle conversation. The gods came willingly to the small, perfect temples around whose carved austerity villas, shops and baths clustered, white and gleaming, under the heavy tropic foliage. Rich pockets of idle life in a sea

of sand these became, where weary officials and fat merchants accompanied by some pleasure companion rested and drank under the shadows of palms and the rich rugs swung over the white-walled courts.

They listened to the gossip of wars in Greece, of the rivals, Rome and Carthage. Roving bandit chiefs from the desert regaled them with tales of blood and of the wind that whistled a song of death in a desert rider's ear. They bargained for horses and gambled for gold, slave girls and Damascene swords.

Rome conquered Egypt, but the desert cities remained as they were. Purple and gold clothes the simplicity of the villas, and the games went on. The square, steel muscled soldiers wrestled and sported, mingling their shouts and the ring of metal with the screams of frightened peacocks, the laughter of women and the tinkle of falling water.

Rome fell. Egypt was half forgotten. The effete inhabitants of the desert cities toyed through the desultory days and nights.

The Arabic invasion next severed the bonds connecting them with the valley and, save for the written records found in the tombs and temples of the last of the Ptolemaic rulers, they were lost and quite forgotten.

It was not known for thirteen centuries where the oases lay. Some thought they were legends. Mariette, the great Egyptologist who believed in their existence, felt that perhaps the inhabitants had attempted migration to Thebes and had been lost in the desert or, after struggling through a few centuries of life, had gradually died off. It seemed even more likely that some wild roving tribe had plundered and destroyed them in a day and passed on. Hichens made a popular novel of the idea.

Much speculation over their existence went on, until some years ago one of the university expeditions felt it worth while to cross back and forth between the caravan routes, fine combing the desert for some trace of them.

One was found over two hundred miles out from the river. The expedition had left this exploratory journey till the last of their season. It was time for the sluices at Assuan to be opened. All of them were eager to reach Cairo and a few luxuries. Their excitement over the dicovery forced from their minds all thought of anything but the oasis.

The exceedingly rich vegetation had thrown down the villas and destroyed all trace of the squares and streets. The baths, and the evidence of fountains, in abundance far greater than usually found in an oasis, surprised them. Even in the forecourt of the temple the sacred lake was represented by a deep pool with stairs descending two sides. There was water in the bottom a few feet deep, and stains on the walls of the pool gave evidence of varying water levels of no great antiquity.

The thing baffled them. Tired as they were, the men scoured the place for the inarticulate tale bearers of the forsaken places of men long dead. A day or so before the date set for departure one of the expedition stood on a step a few feet above the water in the pool sketching some wall carvings. He felt something gently touch his foot. Looking down, he was startled to see the water of the pool slowly lap over the toe of his boot. Bounding up the stairs, he shouted for the others.

They came and watched with wide staring eyes the silent rise of the water. For the remaining half of the day and most of the next they watched, and plumbed its depths. Some one made a casual reference to the date and another remarked its curious coincidence with the sluice opening at Assuan and the flood in the valley.

The idea struck them simultaneously—and for a few minutes no one was able to speak. Incredible as it seemed, it must be so.

An ancient aqueduct under the sand, twenty centuries old, still fed the pool of a forgotten temple with the water of the Nile two hundred miles away.

A Complete Novel

relating the further adventures of that genial, rip-roaring cowboy, Slivers Cassidy

By

FREDERICK J. JACKSON

CASSIDY

CHAPTER I

SLIVERS CASSIDY'S REPUTATION

MR. SLIVERS CASSIDY, ex-cowpuncher, was now the half owner of a cattle ranch; also of a few cows and a large mortgage. His partner in this enterprise was Shorthand Conway, and when it came to worrying about the mortgage it was Mr. Conway who did the heavy work. He was older than Cassidy by many years.

Cassidy had just returned triumphantly from the town of Tres Pecos. He had started out with one thousand dollars in cash and the hope of getting forty cows for that sum. He had returned with the thousand dollars intact, and with thirty-nine fine young Hereford cows, for which he had an airtight bill of sale. As he and Conway sat in the patio of their ranch-house, Cassidy had just finished narrating the hectic series of events that had taken place during his brief stay in Tres Pecos.

Conway's eyes had twinkled occasionally during the yarn, but now he looked severely at his younger partner. He sighed and reached for the whisky bottle.

"That's the way with you young fellers," he drawled. "You ain't to be trusted. Not any! You leave here on a strict business trip—and what do you do? Yeh, what do you do? Answer me that, hey? You get to drinkin' and hellin' around and forget about business."

"Why, I never did!" Cassidy indignantly blurted out. "You got no idea of the worryin' I did. No foolin', Shorthand, I never forgot business a-tall. You got no idea of the worryin' I done when I was locked up in jail with my own attorney and didn't have no money or no cows or no bill of sale or nawthin'. Hell! You don't know what real worry is. There I was in jail—and couldn't even get a drink to help me do some thinkin'. It was awful."

To drown the memory Cassidy reached for the bottle.

"You're a fool for luck!" Conway stated emphatically. "If you only had

ROLLS ONE

some brains—" A deep sigh. "Every move you make only proves what a poor business man you are."

"How come? Didn't I bring the thousand dollars back—and thirty-nine cows, too. That's sure good business, I'm tellin' you."

Mr. Conway snorted. He made funny noises and waved his hands helplessly as he endeavored to control his feelings.

"Good business!" he yelped. "Sufferin' snakes! You had luck enough to horn in on a mess of rewards, and what did you do? Hey? What did you do? Answer me that!"

"Why, I done fine," Cassidy began.

"You *what?* I'm sure payin' for my sins by havin' you as a partner. You went and swapped your cut of the rewards for thirty-nine cows."

"Well, wasn't that fine?"

"*No!* And it was *your* proposition, too. You went and made it yourself, you tell me, and you was plumb pleased when they took you up on it."

"Sure I was pleased."

MR. CONWAY again made funny noises.

"You poor dogie!" he finally managed to yelp coherently. "Do you s'pose they'd 'a' took you up on your proposition unless they saw that it was a hell of a big bargain—to them? Gosh, no! But that's a young feller for you. Never thinkin' of his partner. I bet you went and beat yourself—and me—outa mebbe a thousand dollars. Mebbe fifteen hunderd. As a business man—"

"Aw, shut up!" Cassidy snapped. "I don't see where you got any holler comin'. You wasn't in jail and in all the trouble I was. I went out of here and doubled our money on one deal. That ought to satisfy anybody. What in hell are you kickin' about?"

Mr. Conway grinned happily.

"Nothin' at all, Slivers," he purred, continuing to grin. "I jest likes to spur you till you gets on the prod. And I sure have got somethin' to kick about."

"What's that?" Cassidy's tone denoted that he was still slightly ruffled.

"That poker game you sat into, with the sheriff and the marshal and everybody, after you got the thousand dollars back. You tell me that you played the rest of the night and won eight dollars and two bits."

"I sure did."

"I'm takin' your word that you act'chly did. That's what makes me feel grieved all over. I know your poker playin'. It's terrible. You go and sit in a game with a thousand dollars in front of you—"

"And I won, didn't I?" Cassidy interpolated.

"Yeh, you won eight dollars." A sigh. "Gosh, it must have been a soft game."

"Why?"

"The fact that you won eight dollars proves that it was a soft game. Awful soft and easy. Gosh, I bet that if I'd been sitting in that game I could 'a' lifted the mortgage off this ranch. It's missin' an opportunity like that that makes me feel grieved all over."

"Aw, you go to hell!" Cassidy snorted. Conway's face cracked into a grin.

"What happened around here while I was gone?" Cassidy inquired.

"Nothin' much. I had a coupla visitors. One of the cowboys from the LD brought over a letter for you that was waitin' down at Reynolds."

Conway arose and limped into the ranch-house. He returned shortly and gave a white envelope to Cassidy.

"Golly, I wonder who it's from?" said Cassidy, looking puzzled as he examined the handwriting. He turned the envelope over to look at the back of it, then held it up between his eyes and the sun.

"Don't open it," Conway advised him. "If you do you might find out who it's from."

"Aw, you go—" Cassidy ripped open the envelope, plucked forth a sheet of paper and unfolded it.

The handwriting was large, angular and easily read. Cassidy glanced at it, then started reading aloud:

"Dear Mr. Cassidy:

"I have heard of your work in solving the riddle of the thefts in Los Alamos Valley. I have a problem that is even a greater mystery.

"I am offering you $50 cash for expense money just as an inducement for you to come down here and let me tell you the situation. You will find that my proposition in regard to my problem will be financially worth while to you.

"Kindly respect this communication as being very, very confidential.

"If you do not arrive to ask for me personally here at the mine I shall know that my proposition does not interest you.

Respectfully,
—M. ROBERTSON,
Owner and Manager of
the Oro Mañana Mine."

CASSIDY, finished reading, lowered the sheet of paper, knitted his brows and looked at Conway.

"Ora Mañana?" he said. "That means gold tomorrow, doesn't it?"

"Something like that," Conway answered. "I had a job there once. The 'Paches was bad in them days. I quit the job because I couldn't collect my wages. Old Mike Robertson was allus expectin' that one more day's work on the tunnel he was drivin' would expose the vein he thought was there. That's how the mine got its name.

"I worked there mebbe seven-eight months," Conway continued. "I was the lookout, the guard. I usta lay up on the cliff above the tunnel with a Sharps .50-120 and shoot Injuns. That old buffler gun would salivate a 'Pache a mile away, if I could see him that far, which I couldn't. Oh, we had some tight pinches a coupla times.

"The trouble with Mike Robertson was lack of money. He got two pardners to go in with him while I was there, two different times. Each time he got a new pardner with money I would get my wages. Then it got so that Mike couldn't get any more pardners. Finally I up and quit him. He owes me two months' wages yet. I never did go around to collect after he finally made the big strike. To tell you the truth, I was kinda 'shamed to do it. I admires old Mike. Everybody quit him, but he stuck around and picked away single handed in the tunnel till finally he hit the pay streak he'd been lookin' for. He'd had six different men

put in money at different times before they'd all quit him. After he made the strike danged near every one of 'em come around and claimed a half interest in the mine.

"Mike told 'em that there wasn't that many half interests in the mine, that it was all his. He offered to pay back every cent any of 'em had sunk, and he also said that if they didn't want to be paid in gold he'd pay 'em in lead. Well, Mike was a danged fast gunman. They all was willin' to accept his first proposition. Nobody wanted his second offer. Nobody even sued him. And he paid back, with legal interest, all the money these different pardners had put in at different times."

"Huh!" Cassidy grunted. "And is this M. Robertson this same old Mike Robertson?"

"Nope! It, or he, can't be. Old Mike died seven-eight years back. So I heard. And he didn't die rich, neither. He spent a fortune buildin' a good wagon road over the mountains from Reynolds to his mine. It's rough country. All on end. I heard that it took forty-one tons of powder to blast out that road accordin' to Mike's specifications. He had a big gang of men workin' on it for three-four years. And he laid out a town in the valley below the mine. He was mad at somebody, or everybody. He swore he'd make it so big and fine a town, and would get so many votes in it that he'd make it the county seat instead of Pinkerton City."

"I heard that Pinkerton City still is the county seat," said Cassidy.

"She is. The mine is fourteen miles from Reynolds, which is the nearest point on the railroad. Pinkerton City is even farther from the steel, but she still keeps the official courthouse. There's a trail over a pass, which makes it about ten miles from the mine to Pinkerton. The trail was there in my day, and she sure was a lulu of a rotten trail. Awful!"

Conway poured himself another drink. He poured a smaller one for Cassidy.

"Now this M. Robertson," he continued, "has kinda got me guessin'. I didn't know that old Mike had any relatives, but it sounds like he must 'a' had. This letter—well, I sure can't quite savvy it. A mystery, huh? Huh! That does sound what you might call kinda potential. Gosh, Slivers, you're sure gettin' a repitation, when they're offerin' you fifty dollars jest to coax you down for a powwow."

"Sounds to me like there's a ketch in it somewheres," said Cassidy.

"There never is no ketch in gettin' cash money," said Conway. "That is, if you play 'em close to your vest and keep both eyes open. Now you kin start tomorrow mornin' early. You kin git there tomorrow night. You kin take an extry horse with you and leave him in Reynolds. You'll need a fresh horse to make time over that grade from Reynolds to the mine."

"LISTEN," said Cassidy heavily. "I ain't startin' nowheres tomorrow mornin'. I ain't arrivin' nowheres tomorrow night. I'm gonna stay right here and take a long rest. You got no idea how tired I am. I gotta ketch up on a lotta sleep after that trip to Tres Pecos. What in hell do you think I am? D'you think I'm made of iron?"

"I was thinkin' of the mortgage," said Conway. "You kin make fifty dollars by two-three days' work—which is fifty dollars more than you kin make by layin' around here for two-three days. Why, you usta work a month to make fifty dollars or mebbe only forty."

"Fifty dollars ain't gonna make no difference on that mortgage," said Cassidy.

"The hell it ain't! Fifty dollars here, fifty dollars there, it mounts up. We got to git a lot of fifty dollarses jest to keep up with the interest on the mortgage. Fifty dollars will buy us grub enough for some weeks. And I was tryin' to favor you by givin' you the chance to go and find out about the mystery. If you ain't gonna go, why, you ain't gonna go. I reckon that settles it. I guess my laig has healed up enough to let me fork a bronc for two-three days without gittin' me any

permanent and bad consequences. I'm goin' to ride and collect that fifty dollars for us. And I'm kinda honin' to find out what that mystery is."

"Is that so?" said Cassidy. "You ain't had no fifty dollars offered *you*. That offer was made to me."

"That's all right. I reckon nobody down there knows you. I'll go down and tell this Robertson heir that my name is Cassidy and that I want fifty dollars."

"You danged old faker!" said Cassidy, grinning. "You'd probably get away with it, too. But I ain't gonna give you the chance. Nope! I sure ain't! Right now I've got a good name. Gosh knows what it would be after you got through usin' it for a while. Besides, I'm younger'n you and can stand the long ride better. And I reckon I got more brains, too. They'll come in handy in workin' on this Robertson man's mystery."

"I'm sure grieved," Conway replied, inwardly grinning. "Here I was, all set to break the monogamy of squattin' alone here on this danged ranch, and then you go and change your mind. Yep, I'm sure disappointed."

"Like the devil you are!" Cassidy snorted. "You don't fool me none whatever! I wish to hell I had nerve enough to call your danged bluff and let you take this danged fool trip to that mine. But I can't take chances on your usin' my name like you said you was gonna. Uh-uh! Nope! Not me! I can get the name of Cassidy into enough trouble on my own hook without lettin' you horn in."

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY OF M. ROBERTSON

IT WAS fifty miles from the Plus One ranch to the town of Reynolds, the nearest point on the railroad. It was an easy fifty miles compared to the remainder of the journey, the fourteen miles from Reynolds to the Oro Mañana Mine. Cassidy, having been warned, changed his saddle at Reynolds to a fresh horse. It was nearly sundown when he rode down the last long grade into the little valley where Mike Robertson had hopefully laid out the town that was to have stolen the country seat honors from Pinkerton City.

He saw the gaping mouth of the tunnel at the base of a cliff. Strap iron rails, laid on timbers, led from this to a stamp mill and continued on from the far side of the mill to the edge of a huge dump heap. The mill was silent. Cassidy wondered why. Finally he figured out that it must be Sunday. His real interest, however, was centered on the top of the cliff above the tunnel. His imagination had been stirred by Conway's terse, casual mention of having lain entrenched on the summit with a Sharps .50-120-500 to pot Indians at long range. Raiding Apaches, when pursued by cavalry, had used the valley as a highway to their mountain retreats beyond.

Cassidy rode down through a grass grown street, heading for a group of buildings below the stamp mill. On that street two out of three structures that had once housed various commercial enterprises were empty, deserted. The Silver Moon Saloon had had most of the decorated glass knocked out of its windows. The silver moons evidently had presented tempting targets to small boys from the shelter of an alley mouth across the street. Through an unglazed opening an expensive bar and fixtures were visible. A small padlock hung proudly on the front door, from which the upper glass panels had been broken. The wreckage of the saloon was typical of the town.

A man stepped from a doorway and started across the street. Cassidy, when within a few yards, hailed him.

"Say, pardner, where can I find the mine boss?"

"Up at the office, I s'pose." A jerk of his thumb indicated the direction. "But you're out of luck. They're firin', not hirin'. You look like a cowboy, anyway."

"The hell I do," grinned Cassidy. "But I was lookin' for directions, not descriptions. Thanks!"

He rode on.

Cassidy had followed instructions or, perhaps, what might be called the orders in the letter. He had not stopped to ask any questions in Reynolds, beyond inquiring which road led to the Oro Mañana. On the road he had met no one until he reached the town. Therefore it was a complete surprise for him to discover that the owner and manager of the mine was a woman.

MR. ROBERTSON stood for Mary Robertson. She was about forty-eight or fifty years of age. She was Mike Robertson's half-sister. He had willed the entire property of Oro Mañana to her. She had come West and had attempted for some seven years to operate the mine herself. Her first two days at Oro Mañana had been sufficient to make her very unpopular.

Cassidy walked into the office. He saw this woman, and his assumption was that she was the owner's wife.

"Is Mr. Robertson here?" he inquired.

"No. There is no Mr. Robertson. I am *Miss* Robertson, the owner and manager. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Uh! Well— That is— I—" Cassidy was a bit confused.

"What's your name?" she cut in.

"Who? Me? My name's Cassidy."

"Oh! I half suspected it. Take a chair, please."

Miss Robertson closed the office door.

"Of course you received my letter," she said; it was a statement, not a question.

"Yeh. Yes, ma'am, I sure did. I— uh—"

"Naturally that is why you are here," she finished for him. "Now, Mr. Cassidy, I trust that you are not a drinking man."

"Who? Me? Say ma'am, did you write me and want me to ride clear over here jest to inquire into my politics or my private habits?"

Cassidy's tone held a belligerent note. He lost his embarrassment, for he already felt quite a dislike for Miss Robertson. He grinned, however, and decided to answer her question.

"No, ma'am, I ain't exactly what you might call a drinkin' man. Not exactly. You might put it that my motto is 'down with licker'."

Her severe face cracked in a way that Cassidy took to be meant for a friendly smile. He coughed several times. He had to cough to keep from laughing.

"My gosh! I thought my remark was wide open," he said to himself, "and she missed it." He coughed again.

"I am glad to hear that," she said. "I have been absolutely disgusted with the average man I have met since coming West. And none of these drinking men seem to appreciate in the slightest my earnest efforts to stop the iniquitous traffic. I have done my best—"

A sigh. She momentarily and piously looked at the ceiling.

"That's sure too bad, ma'am," said Cassidy. "What was it you sent for me to come over here and talk to you about?"

Cassidy's main desire was to collect the promised fifty dollars and return to the Plus One ranch. He also felt that he needed a drink of whisky. Two minutes with Miss Robertson had served to make him feel that way. Then he decided that he was wrong; he needed two drinks. As he put it, his ideas had been spattered all over the place.

"*M*. Robertson? Huh! Gosh! I need a flock of drinks. She's sure awful wearin' on a man's nerves."

"IN SPITE of my efforts, Mr. Cassidy, I have been unable to keep the mine running at anywhere near its capacity," she began again. "For years the output has been so small that it has barely sufficed to pay the cost of production. And the outgoing gold—small though each shipment was—has been stolen upon fourteen separate occasions."

"How?" Cassidy inquired, beginning to be interested.

"Why, the stage has been held up and robbed."

"Huh! Fourteen times, you say?"

"Fourteen times within two years," she elucidated.

"The h— I beg your pardon, ma'am. How often do you ship?"

"Once a month, formerly. Three of these big shipments were stolen. But there was too much bloodshed. Three men were killed. Then I made the shipments smaller—fortnightly. Right now I am shipping about once a week. I never ship twice in succession on the same day of the week. My losses have been much smaller."

"But you're still losing some. Do you suspect any one?"

"No. But nearly everybody seems to be against me. I can't—" she paused.

"You can't understand why? Is that it?"

"Yes, and I can't understand why only the occasional larger shipments are being stolen."

"Say, ma'am, ain't the express company responsible for the gold?"

"The express company has discontinued its service here."

"How come? I sure can't savvy that."

"We disagreed. My principles could not tolerate the company's choice of agents."

"Uh! Well, ma'am, why don't you hire guards to protect the shipments?"

"That, Mr. Cassidy, is indeed a bright idea; but I have tried it."

"You have?"

"Surely. Any child would think of doing that!"

"Didn't it work?"

Cassidy digested her last remark. His face began to turn crimson beneath the tan. It grew quite red. He disliked Miss Robertson more than ever.

"Yes and no," she replied. "I once tried the experiment of arming six of my employees—six miners; large, strapping men—and sending them as escort to my biggest shipment of the year."

"Yeah, and what happened?" Cassidy was beginning to get interested.

"Two of them got shot. One was badly wounded and the other man died. These two were the only ones among the six who had the courage to attempt to offer resistance when a lone masked man held up the stage."

"Miners ain't gunmen," said Cassidy, authoritively. "Why don't you hire some real gun throwers?"

"I did," she replied wearily. "I had to discharge them."

"Didn't they protect your shipments?"

"They did, I must confess. But they drank—"

"Is that why you fired 'em?"

"Indeed, yes! My principles are firm and fixed. I would rather lose money than retain on my payroll any man who drinks!"

"PRINCIPLES is all right, if you can afford to have 'em," said Cassidy. "Now, me, I got a lotta principles—but there's a lot more that I can't afford to have. No foolin', I can't."

Cassidy grinned cheerfully, a grin that usually got a response. It did this time, but the response was a heavy frown. For a moment Miss Robertson eyed Cassidy very, very doubtfully. He straightened his face.

"How many bandits was there usually in the gang that stuck up the stage?" he inquired. "I mean after the one man ruined your guards."

"One," she replied.

"Huh! Only one?"

"One seems to be sufficient," she declared tartly. "This one bandit is ruining me. He has stolen the profits I had counted on. He has put me heavily in debt to the bank in Reynolds. There seems to be a deliberate plot against me, a plot to force me to give up the mine."

"You don't say? But I ain't heard nawthin' about the payroll ever bein' stole. Ain't you ever been robbed of that?"

"No. The stage has never been held up when returning from Reynolds."

"Gosh! That's sure somethin' for me to think over," said Cassidy. "And I kinda understand that you ain't runnin' the mine at anywhere near its capacity. How come?"

"Because I am unable to obtain a sufficient number of miners to work for me."

"Maybe you don't pay high enough wages. There's lotsa folks who lose out because they're short sighted that way."

"I am not!" she snapped out. "I pay good wages—better than any. But the lure of the demon rum seems, unfortunately, to be greater than anything else. I discharge immediately any man who touches liquor. I adhere firmly to my principles. This mine would be a success, I am certain, if my poor, deluded half-brother Michael had not committed one error." She paused for breath.

"What was that mistake, ma'am."

"He sold a plot of land to a rum seller, who erected a saloon."

"A saloon? Only one? Is it still open?"

"Yes, unfortunately; but when I arrived here there were eight vile saloons. But seven of them were operating on leased ground. My poor brother had such high hopes for the future that he had sold very few lots outright. Instead, he erected buildings and leased them for varying terms instead of selling them outright. He expected that the increased value of the land at the end of the leases would make him several times a millionaire. The rentals were not high, for he wanted to encourage business to come to the town. His one idea was to make it the largest town in the county."

"Yeh, I heard about that," said Cassidy. "His idea was fine; but what was wrong with it?"

"Difficulties of transportation. This dream town of Michael's was too far from the railroad. It still is. Since my poor brother passed away, the town has lost three fourths—approximately—of its population."

The office door opened suddenly, to admit a girl. She was about nineteen or twenty. One glance at her was sufficient to make Cassidy's jaw drop a full inch. Open mouthed, he continued to stare at her as he arose awkwardly to his feet. Mechanically he rubbed one hand across his face. He wished that he had taken the time to get a shave in Reynolds before riding over the mountain, for it had taken him about one fifth of a second to decide that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Oh, I'm sorry, auntie; I didn't know that you were busy," she apologized, after glancing briefly at Cassidy.

"This is the Mr. Cassidy whom you wanted me to send for," Miss Robertson answered. "Mr. Cassidy, this is my niece, Ruth Robertson. She is my only living relative."

"Puh—pleased to meetcha, ma'am," Cassidy stammered. "I sure am," he added.

"I am glad that you came, Mr. Cassidy," said the girl, walking forward and offering her hand.

"So'm I, ma'am," Cassidy blurted out.

"Ruth, see if you can find Mr. Griggs. Bring him here," Miss Robertson ordered. "Mr. Cassidy no doubt desires to hear details of the robberies. The stage driver—Mr. Griggs—" she explained, glancing at Cassidy, "can give you the details at first hand."

The girl, with a farewell friendly smile at Cassidy, had departed.

"NOW, LISTEN, ma'am," said Cassidy. "I ain't never seen this Mr. Griggs, the stage driver, but from what you told me I've been wonderin'—"

"About what?"

"About how come that the bandit allus knows so pat when a big shipment is on the stage. I ain't suspectin' this Mr. Griggs of anything, you understand. I was jest wonderin', tha's all."

"To suspect Mr. Griggs is simply ridiculous," she said scoffingly.

"How long has he been drivin' for you?"

"Nearly three years. He is a reliable driver, that's all. After the first robbery, he explained to me that he had taken a job to drive a stage, not to fight bandits. He said that if he had attempted resistance he would have been killed. He like-

wise frankly informed me that if I desired a gun fighting stage driver he did not fill the bill at all."

"Yeh," Cassidy agreed, "I've noticed that stage drivers who don't try to fight robbers is the kind that lives longest. It's sure suicide, most o' the time, to try to make a gunplay when the other man has the drop. But how does this bandit know when a big shipment is on the stage? I'm jest comin' back, ma'am, to what I was wonderin' about."

"I must confess that that is a mystery," she replied. "I once discharged Mr. Griggs, because I thought I detected the rank, vile odor of liquor on his breath. I replaced him with a man who carried what is known as a sawed off shotgun on the seat beside him as part of his driving equipment. This man was shot and killed on his first trip out with a gold shipment. He was the third man to be killed."

"Huh!" Cassidy grunted. "Maybe Griggs was mad at bein' fired. Maybe Griggs went out and dry gulched this *hombre*."

"Now, Mr. Cassidy, you must not leap at impossible theories. When the new driver was killed, Mr. Griggs was right here in town. In fact, at the approximate hour that the stage was held up, Mr. Griggs was right here in the office explaining to me that he did not drink liquor."

"I thought you said you fired him because you smelled it on his breath."

"I merely thought I did. Mr. Griggs explained very satisfactorily. He is afflicted at times with severe indigestion. For this he partakes of a certain remedy—a tablespoon before and after meals. He showed me the bottle. He had been taking the medicine, according to the printed directions, for years. He informed me that this remedy, much as he disliked the taste and smell of it, was all that enabled him to eat and digest regular meals. This remedy is a brownish amber fluid that smells deceivingly like whisky. Why, he has to carry the bottle with him on the stage, for fear he will be taken unexpectedly with an attack of indigestion."

"Uh! I see." Cassidy strangled a grin.

WHEN Mr. Griggs was ushered in by the girl, Cassidy took one searching look and almost laughed aloud. Mr. Griggs had a nose that was a combination of a beak and a bulb. It was a beautiful blue red—a gleaming jewel, set in a bold, but foxy, furtive face. His eyes were shrewd, but slightly watery, washed out, pale blue eyes, flanked by a myriad of squint wrinkles. The expression of his eyes was totally blank. Cassidy got an impression of shrewdness from the angle of the partly closed lids.

Mr. Griggs was perhaps fifty years of age. Aside from his nose, the rest of his face was the color and texture of russet saddle leather. It was smooth; there were no wrinkles in it except around the eyes. His mouth was a colorless straight slit. His hair was gray. His face was clean shaven. Cassidy felt that Mr. Griggs was a character who would bear watching. In fact, Cassidy's suspicions had been aroused before he had even seen the stage driver.

Miss Robertson introduced the two men. Griggs shook hands firmly. His face relaxed, just a slight muscle movement, accompanied by a momentary gleam in the pale eyes. It took a big stretch of imagination to say that Mr. Griggs smiled.

"Perhaps you have heard of Mr. Cassidy," Miss Robertson said to Griggs. "He is the man who cleaned up the cattle thieves in Los Alamos Valley."

Miss Robertson was standing slightly behind Cassidy's right shoulder. Cassidy winced and had to restrain his right foot from going sidewise and backward and making a violent contact with one of Miss Robertson's shins.

"For cripes' sake, woman, shut up!" Cassidy did not say the words aloud; he only thought them.

"Yes," she continued, "Mr. Cassidy has come over here to see what he can do

toward stopping the losses of our shipments."

"Yeh?" said Griggs, looking at Cassidy again.

Cassidy groaned to himself.

"Dang her!" he thought. "She's spoilin' my chances of doin' any good a-tall!"

"Naw, I didn't!" Cassidy denied in a disgusted tone. "I come over here because I was promised fifty dollars for comin'. That's why I come. I ain't no detective or nawthin' like that. I wanted the fifty dollars, tha's all."

"Yes," Ruth Robertson chimed in, "that was to be regarded as a sort of consultation fee. You ought to pay it to him now, auntie." The girl had seen the frown on her aunt's face and had hastened to speak.

"Very well!" Miss Robertson's tone was icy; she threw a reproving glance at her niece for speaking out of turn. "I shall pay the fifty dollars. Perhaps it is best to let that end the episode. Mr. Cassidy does not seem to be in sympathy—"

"But he is," the girl interrupted. "I can see that he is. Aren't you, Mr. Cassidy?" Her smile was disarming—and almost pleading.

"Well—uh—I reckon you put it jest about right," he replied. "I'll sure do what I can." Cassidy had not intended to say anything of the kind, but he had made the mistake of looking directly at the girl. "Uh, course, you understand that I ain't guaranteein' nawthin'—"

"Of course," Miss Robertson agreed.

Her tone was queer. She had framed an acidulous retort, but had restrained it. She glanced in turn at Cassidy, her niece and Griggs.

"And," the girl went on, "I think the right thing to do is to let Mr. Griggs tell his experiences to Mr. Cassidy. Now, you two men go out and have a talk. Both of you can come back in about an hour to our house and have supper with us. Then we can all go to church together."

"Yes, that will be fine," said Miss Robertson.

She did not look as if she altogether approved of this program, but her niece had taken things out of her hands. The girl had a way with her. In fact she led the way across the room.

GRIGGS and Cassidy started for the door. They stopped midway as from outside came a hail—

"Hello, folks!"

"Oh, that's Mr. Whiting!" Miss Robertson exclaimed.

She hastened ahead of her niece and opened the door, to reveal a man on horseback a few yards away. He wore a black frock coat, a boiled shirt, corduroy pants and fancy riding boots. His hat was in his hand; he had a full moon face and a partially bald head.

"Hello, folks," the horseman repeated.

Mr. Griggs nodded distantly and scuttled past him. Cassidy followed Mr. Griggs, taking his time, however, and sizing up the newcomer. About one hundred feet down the road Cassidy caught up with Griggs.

"Who's that *hombre?*" Cassidy inquired in a hoarse whisper.

"Him? Oh, that's Sheriff Whiting. He's come a-courtin'."

"Courtin'? Who?"

"Danged if I know," said Griggs. "He rides over along about supper time every Sunday night. He sure comes jest in time to horn in on supper. Then he goes to church with the women, a-smirkin' jest like he'd curl up his toes if he ever missed a chance to go to church."

"I see," Cassidy nodded. "I take it that the sheriff don't set well on your indigestion."

"You're danged right he don't!" Mr. Griggs snapped out vindictively. "I don't dare to tell all I suspect about that fat faced, grinnin' old fool. Naw! I sure don't!" Mr. Griggs scowled fiercely and quickened his pace, as if to get away from poisoned atmosphere. "And," he grumbled, "Miss Ruth means well, but she ain't got better sense than to invite me to set through supper with him. He'll give me a bellyache. That's what Miss

Robertson *don't* call it; she says it's indigestion."

By this time Mr. Griggs had led the way around a corner. Cassidy grinned as Mr. Griggs stopped in order to get his second wind on his oration of hate.

"Why, he—" Griggs began.

"Yeh," Cassidy hastened to interrupt. "I know how you feel. I feel awful bad myself."

He caught Mr. Griggs by the arm, reached around and patted his coat tails. *Tunk!* Cassidy slapped a flask that was in one of Griggs' hip pockets.

"Fish it out," said Cassidy. "I'm jest about ready to double up with an attack of this here, now, indigestion."

Mr. Griggs momentarily glared. But Cassidy's knowing grin melted the glare. Mr. Griggs smiled sheepishly. He looked cautiously around.

"Not here," he advised. "Somebody'll tell it to the boss. This is an awful snoopy town. Besides," he added, "it's only a remedy for indigestion. Sure shootin', it is! I can prove it by the boss herself. Yep! She sure suspected me, but I proved my case, you might say." Griggs led the way into an alley. No one was in sight, so he brought out the bottle, which bore a patent medicine label. "You're the jasper they call Slivers Cassidy, ain't-cha?" Griggs inquired.

"Yeh, they call me that." Cassidy sniffed at the open bottle, then gurgled freely and confidently.

"Woof! That's sure the pure quill in bellyache medicine," he said. "A bit over a hundred proof and maybe five-six years old."

"You're an expert," said Griggs. "You're so danged much of an expert that this pint ain't gonna get us nowhere. I can see that. We've only got an hour, too, before we're due to accept that invite to eat with the women folks."

"An hour is plenty," said Cassidy. "I wanta have a talk with you."

Griggs again led the way, continuing down the alley to the back door of a saloon. He stopped and looked both ways, up and down the alley.

"I generally don't take chances on goin' in here before it gets so dark that nobody can see me," he explained. "I'm riskin' my job if anybody sees me—you betcha! But I kin see that you're all right. I gotta have that bottle refilled after trustin' you with it for that one drink you took."

CHAPTER III

THE DRINKING HOUR IN ORO MAÑANA

FROM the brief history of things that he had heard from Miss Robertson, Cassidy suspected that Mr. Griggs had much to do with the robberies of the gold shipments. To be sure, that lady had provided an absolute alibi for Mr. Griggs for the killing of the stage driver who had taken over the reins during the brief period when Griggs had been suspected of being a drinking man. Cassidy had one large suspicion that one of Griggs' accomplices had shot the new driver in order to open the way for Griggs to squat again on the job. Cassidy's first hope had been that he would be able to sift around, his identity unknown, and gather information in his own peculiar ways. But Miss Robertson had spoiled that idea, and the only reason he was sticking around, instead of heading back for the ranch, was because of Ruth Robertson's sweet personality and ways.

He and Griggs seated themselves at a table. A bartender came in to take their orders.

"Business sure is slow," said Griggs, after the bartender had gone again. "I betcha there ain't a customer out in front. There won't be none till it gets dark—and then they'll be in here, at that, 'stead of out in front."

As Mr. Griggs finished speaking, the back door opened to admit a customer, obviously a miner. At that moment the bartender returned with a tray upon which reposed two glasses of Bourbon, which were for Cassidy and Griggs.

"Hello, Frank," said the newcomer,

fetching up alongside a table and beginning to pull empty pint bottles from various pockets. "I got six here that I want filled."

"That's the way it is," said Mr. Griggs. "All public sociability is gone. Everybody is afraid of losing his job. And I betcha there's more bulk of licker bein' drunk in private, you might say, than there ever was slid across the eight bars that used to be wide open here in town."

"That so?" Cassidy remarked.

"You betcha! These here per capital statistics is sumpin' you can't get away from. The town's shrunk, she's shrunk like hell, and what I meant by a bigger bulk of licker is more per capital, per person, of what is left of the town. Why," Mr. Griggs continued earnestly, "the drinkin' of licker has come to be nawthin' more or less than a sportin' proposition. A man will h'ist every drink he takes and say, 'Here's to my job!' He never knows when he's gonna lose it. With due respect to my boss, y'understand, she ain't got sense enough to come out of a blizzard when she ain't dressed proper for it. But her niece—now there's a girl with sense. You betcha! Everybody likes Miss Ruth. If the old dame would kick the bucket, I betcha that Miss Ruth would be able to carry out old Mike's idee of makin' this the biggest town in the county. She sure could do it. You betcha! Why, if it wasn't for her, I'd tell Miss Robertson jest where to go. I'd sure quit the job. But Miss Ruth has an interest in things. She needs a reliable stage driver like me. That's why I'm stickin' on the job."

"Yeh?" said Cassidy. "I'm takin' your word for it that you're so danged reliable." A grin, slightly forced. "As you know, I was called over here because of the robberies. I sure agree with you on certain remarks. You're the lad who's been stuck up alla time by this bandit." Cassidy figuratively had his tongue in his cheek. "I wish you'd tell me who you suspect."

"Huh! I suspect Sheriff Whiting!" Griggs snapped out.

"That's a nice, solid suspicion," Cassidy agreed. "Now I wish you'd tell me jest exactly why you suspect him."

"Oh, hell!" said Mr. Griggs. "I oughta knowed you'd ast me danged fool questions that I can't answer. I reckon the main reason, besides the fact that I don't like him, is that he has the complete confidence of Miss Robertson. He breezes over every Sunday night, and sometimes in the middle of the week—and she tells him *everything*. Yep! She even tells him when she's gonna ship. Mebbe half a dozen times Whiting has rid over and made hisself a personal guard for the gold. He ambles along on his bronc a couple hundred yards behind the stage all the way to Reynolds. And there ain't been no holdup any time that the sheriff hisself is along. Figger it out for yourself."

"I FIGGER we oughta have another drink," said Cassidy. "Miss Robertson oughta hire the sheriff for a guard."

"She oughta hire me to shoot him," retorted Mr. Griggs. "One of these days I'm gonna do it free for nawthin'. I figger that shootin' the sheriff will stop these robberies that's been takin' place right along. One good man kin stop 'em. You kin do it, easy; providin'," he added, "that Miss Robertson don't find out that you h'ist a drink once in a while. Why, she's so what you might call rabid on the subject that she'd rather fire a drinkin' man *pronto* from the job than let him go ahead and plunk a bullet into the bandit. Believe me or not, that's jest the situation. I'd like to do it myself, but I ain't no gunman. I ain't no good at shootin'. I know I ain't. I never try any funny stuff with this bandit, which the same is the reason I'm alive today."

"What makes you think that the sheriff is the bandit?" Cassidy inquired. "Does he fit the description in any way?"

"Well, he's got two laigs, two arms, one haid and can stand erect on his two feet," Griggs replied seriously. "I can't

guess at this bandit's shape or weight, 'cause he allus wears a long black slicker that covers him plumb down to his feet. Why, he don't even wear a hat that I can identify. He wears half a flour sack over his haid. There's two big eyeholes cut in the sack. I can't prove that he's the sheriff; I jest think he is on general principles."

"Uh-huh!" Cassidy nodded thoughtfully. "Fish out that bottle of bellyache medicine and fill up my glass. It's better stuff than this bar whisky."

"Yeh, it sure is," said Mr. Griggs in a pleased tone. "I allus gets it filled in Reynolds." He listened momentarily. "A customer out in front," he announced. "This *hombre*, whoever he is, is due to lose his job. Right now, Miss Ruth is probably cookin' supper. And right now, I betcha, Miss Robertson is snoopin' out in the street in front to see who goes in or comes out the front door. The passenger traffic on the stage line is a payin' proposition, thanks to this same snoopin'. An agency up in Trinidad keeps siftin' 'em down here, keeps sendin' good miners down. They're willin' to come, on account of the good wages offered. O' course they're all told that they mustn't drink. But most of 'em does. That's what keeps the outgoin' traffic so brisk." He broke off his speech as another man entered the rear door.

"Hello, Griggs," said the newcomer. "Be careful. She's out in front. I just peeked around the corner and verified my suspicions."

The door through which the bartender entered the rear room opened directly into the space behind the bar. A person in the main barroom could not enter the rear room unless he first climbed over the bar in order to get to the connecting door. The bartender came into the back room and touched a match to the wick of the hanging lamp.

"Fill her up, Frank," said the newcomer, holding out a quart bottle. "And she's out in the street, as usual. I just saw her."

The bartender nonchalantly departed through the door, carrying the bottle held low, well below the level of the top of the bar as he entered the front room. He stooped and filled the bottle from a spigot in a barrel beneath the bar. He returned to the rear room, the bottle dangling in the hand at the level of his knees.

"Chalk it up till next payday," said the customer, tucking the bottle in the front of his shirt and then departing into the alley. It now was nearly dark.

"Sure, Mac," had been the bartender's reply to the request for credit.

The bartender returned to the front room to attend to the wants of the miner who was due to lose his job the next day.

"NOW THERE went a fine hypocrite," said Griggs, nodding toward the alley door. "That's MacDonald, the mine foreman. He's the town marshal, too, I betcha he jest got back sometime late this afternoon."

"Back? From where?" Cassidy inquired.

"From Reynolds. He owns the fastest mountain climbing hoss in these parts. He goes to Reynolds every Saturday night. He likes to put his foot on the rail and drink sociable. He gets hootin' drunk every Saturday night and comes back here every Sunday in time to go to church. Sometimes he slips away from here in the middle of the week. That hoss of his can make Reynolds in less than two hours. That hoss is a wonder. Any other hoss would get stove up, the way Mac rides him fast downhill. Mac can go to Reynolds, get half drunk by keepin' his foot on the rail for a coupla hours, and be back here by midnight. He does it right along. He's slick, that man, the way he keeps foolin' Miss Robertson inta thinkin' he's a teetotaler."

"Huh!" Cassidy grunted thoughtfully. "It's a wonder to me that Miss Robertson doesn't get an idea about watchin' the alley door here, instead of wastin' her time in front."

"Aw, teetotalers never ketch on to what's goin' on behind their backs.

They're kinda blind. All they kin see is their own long noses right in front of 'em. Besides, that alley is awful dark at night. Most of the back room trade takes place after dark. She gits enough results, anyway, by watchin' the front. She sorta prides herself that she's dried up the town. Ha—ha!"

Mr. Griggs leaned across the table. He took Cassidy's empty glass, placed it beside his own empty one, and proceeded to make an equal division of his indigestion remedy.

"Fill her up, Frank," he ordered, holding up the empty flask when the bartender again appeared.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST NIGHT

CASSIDY and Griggs went over to Miss Robertson's home. They arrived just in time for supper. During the meal—much to Cassidy's utter disgust—Miss Robertson confided to the sheriff that she had hired Cassidy to investigate the robberies.

"That's a good idea, ma'am," said the sheriff. He turned to Cassidy. "I don't know what luck you'll have in catching the bandit," he said, "but I'm certain that you can stop the robberies by following the stage on horseback. Stay two or three hundred yards behind the stage all the way to Reynolds. I did that same thing several times, and the bandit never showed up. I been tellin' Miss Robertson that she ought to send a man along that way whenever she sends out a shipment. I'm busy most of the time and can't come over personally to do it. I sent my chief deputy over—once—to be a guard, but—"

"Once was more than sufficient," Miss Robertson cut in icily. "He patronized the saloon, after returning here on his way back to Pinkerton City. I can not understand, Mr. Whiting, how a man of your high principles can tolerate an underling who drinks."

"Well, Miss Robertson," the sheriff explained, "as I told you before, he's a good man in his line. And there's the political angle to it, too; I can't afford to antagonize his friends."

"You should be fearless; you should be above that sort of petty toadying!" she declared. "You should summarily discharge that man in the same manner you discharged the other deputy who spent nearly an hour in the saloon before attempting to ride out of town behind the stage."

"Yeh, I fired him to oblige you," said the sheriff, "but if you hadn't stopped him and scorched him with a sermon and ordered him to return to Pinkerton instead of lettin' him guard the stage that trip you'd have saved yourself a lot of money."

"That is my affair," said Miss Robertson frigidly. "To be sure, the stage was held up that day and I lost a ten pound ingot, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had adhered to my rule of never employing in any capacity a man who drinks."

Metaphorically, Cassidy's ears were flapping. He could scarcely believe them. In a dazed sort of way he looked around the table. Miss Robertson was frowning; her eyes blazed with a queer glow. Cassidy tried to think of a word to describe it. Fanatical was the right word, but it was not in Cassidy's vocabulary. He decided that she was as crazy as hell, and let it go at that.

He looked at Sheriff Whiting, who was staring fatuously at Ruth Robertson. The girl kept her gaze lowered to the victuals on her plate.

"He's sure come a-courtin'," Cassidy said to himself. "And it ain't the old dame he's got his eye on, either. A blind man could see that."

From across the table Griggs finally caught Cassidy's eye. Mr. Griggs allowed one eyelid to flutter; beyond that he kept a poker face. Cassidy followed this lead, but it took a great effort. He choked and coughed as he grew aware that Miss Robertson had turned to him. He had to cough in order to strangle a grin at the idea that Griggs had been in doubt, even

for a moment, as to which of the two women the sheriff was obsequiously trying to impress. And it was equally obvious that the spinster mine owner blandly attributed to herself the reason for the sheriff's weekly visits.

MISS ROBERTSON hastened the end of the meal and herded her niece and the three male guests off to church. Cassidy had noted that the church was by far the largest structure in the town. Mike Robertson, doing things with a broad hand, had paid for that church. Cassidy learned later that Mike had spent $62,000 on the structure. It was part of his dream to make Oro Mañana the largest town in the county.

But Mike had made hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the mine. He had once employed over six hundred men, whereas now there were only sixty-six employees on Miss Robertson's payroll. Mike had not lost a cent through bandits or high graders among his employees. He had hired guards who were efficient in their line. They had to be efficient in order to keep their jobs. Mike had not troubled himself about the liquor problem. As far as Mike had been concerned there was no problem. He had not attempted to change the accepted order of things. He had believed that a certain amount of liquor had its place. In fact, he regularly and personally had placed a lot of liquor where he felt it belonged.

Mike had taken a great pride in the erection of the big church. It was by far the largest church in the Territory. He had imported a minister from the East and had placed him on the mine payroll. As Mike had said—

"That preacher is worth the money; he sure can tear the lid off hell."

Miss Robertson unconsciously agreed with this, but not in those exact words. Anyway, she was still continuing to pay the minister's salary.

At its height, just before Mike's death, the population of the town had reached the seventeen hundred mark. Mike's attitude had been:

"There's your church. She's the biggest, slickest church in the Territory. You can take it or leave it!"

And it had been not at all unusual for the church to be filled to its capacity of eight hundred seats.

When Mike Robertson's half-sister arrived to take charge of things she had been shocked at what she termed the moral looseness of the town. Within a few days she had started certain reforms. A year later the town's population had dwindled to less than one thousand. Church attendance had fallen off even a greater percentage. She had undertaken a personal house to house canvass, accompanied by the minister, in an attempt to keep the church filled. The result of this earnest campaign had been discouraging, to say the least. She succeeded only in proving that the town contained scores of people who did not like her and who cheerfully lied to her.

The Sunday night before the canvass there had been about two hundred and fifty people in the church. She, during the week, had obtained pledges and promises that seemed to guarantee the presence of at least seven hundred the following Sunday evening. She had been astounded, baffled and very much hurt upon quietly counting a congregation that numbered exactly ninety-eight. She had wanted to go on the warpath, but the minister had stopped her. He had tactfully pointed out that people did not like to have religion forced upon them, that they resented it.

She had finally taken his advice and during the years that followed had left church affairs entirely in the hands of the minister. The people liked him. He was a student of psychology as well as religion. He did not pry. He attended strictly to his own business. He made everybody feel that he was a friend in need; he was ever ready with solace, sympathy or advice. The same people who swore at Miss Robertson swore by the minister.

It took him years to undo the harm that Miss Robertson had done. Miss

Robertson had been a member of a certain church in the East. She had been very narrow minded. She still was—about most things.

Upon first coming to Oro Mañana, the minister had dropped his sectarianism. Mike Robertson had very much approved of this. A chaste little sign, in letters of white on a black board, at one side of the front door of the church still bore the words "The House of God".

Cassidy, attending church for the first time in years, was rather surprised to see Frank, the owner of the only saloon in the town. The congregation numbered nearly three hundred. This was a large compliment to the minister's popularity, for the town, now, including men, women and children, mustered less than four hundred and fifty souls.

AFTER the services Cassidy decided to accept the stage-driver's invitation to bunk in his cabin. The sheriff had, as usual, taken a room at what was called the hotel. It had been a hotel once, but was now only a building containing furnished but vacant rooms. The sheriff had obtained the key from Miss Robertson and helped himself to a room.

Cassidy was offered his choice of a room at the hotel, but he chose to bunk with Griggs. He had almost dismissed Griggs as a suspect or as a suspected accomplice in the robberies. There were several reasons for Cassidy's choosing the stage driver as his host. Griggs was willing to be both convivial and garrulous. Cassidy did not like the sheriff. Griggs' suspicion that the sheriff was the bandit sounded interesting as well as plausible. Cassidy wanted to hear more on the subject.

"Tell you what," said Griggs, after they had left the sheriff and the Robertsons. "I'll go down to Frank's and get a quart."

"That's half an idea," said Cassidy. "The other half is that I go with you and get a quart too."

"Aw, we won't need two quarts," Griggs replied in a tone that was only politely or tentatively argumentative.

"Do you feel sleepy or tired?" Cassidy inquired.

"Nope! Neither one. I feel good."

"Then how do you know we won't need two quarts?"

Griggs chuckled and led the way.

"I sure took a shine to you, Cassidy," Griggs confided as they turned down the dark alley. "I sure have. I like a man with brains. Now, that two quart idea of yours shows that you have brains."

"Aw, that wasn't brains. It was the result of experience. I was afraid that we might run short and that this Frank might close his place early."

"Well, he don't close too early," said Griggs.

Then they arrived at the back door of the saloon.

A few minutes later, as they were going out of the saloon, they met the sheriff going in. The sheriff grinned at them.

Cassidy laughed as he and Griggs started down the alley.

"What's the joke?" Griggs inquired.

"Nawthin' much. I was wonderin' if Miss Robertson knows that the sheriff sneaks down to Frank's."

"No! He's a coffee bean chewer!" Griggs said this as if it were the worst insult he could hand a man. Cassidy grinned at Griggs' tone.

A LITTLE later they were in Griggs' cabin. The kerosene lamp was lighted. Cassidy seated himself on a wooden bench alongside the uncovered wooden table and was rolling a cigaret while Griggs ransacked his cupboard in an endeavor to find a second glass.

"I mostly nips straight from the bottle," he explained, "but it's kind of more refined to use glasses when you have company."

He found another large heavy glass tumbler and proceeded to wipe the dust from it with a very dirty towel. He sat down and poured two liberal hookers.

"Yep," he continued, "I can see that you got a lot of brains and a lot of imag-

ination, Cassidy. But I can see that your imagination has had an awful strain put on it lately. You can't fool me." He raised his tumbler. "Here's to the good of your imagination!" was his toast.

They drank.

Cassidy failed to get his drift. Bluntly he asked for an explanation.

"There's been fourteen holdups," Griggs went on. "One man stagin' fourteen holdups and gettin' away clean with them is what's botherin' your imagination, ain't it?"

"Somethin' like that," Cassidy agreed.

"Sounds fishy as hell, don't it?" Griggs pursued.

"You said it."

"And you're doin' a lot of wonderin'?"

Cassidy grinned, for Griggs had just about read his mind.

"I'm 'way ahead of you, Griggs. What's the answer?"

"A fool woman!" A scowl. "I reckon you've figgered for yourself, already, that she's got a whole troupe of trained bats in her belfry. Just combine that with the fact that she's got milk in her veins and you have the answer."

"Have I?" said Cassidy. "You say I have—but she ain't complete."

"Huh! Meanin' Miss Robertson's set of brains?"

"I didn't mean it that way. I meant the answer."

"Oh! Well, I reckon the rest of it can be supplied by sayin' that she figgers one drop of anybody's blood is worth more than a ton of gold. She sure does. Why, when she sent six miners along as a guard she figgered 'em only as a big bluff that this bandit wouldn't call. Two of these miners got plugged, which made the boss feel so sick that she stayed in bed for a week. She blamed herself, accordin' to her own figgerin'. She's still payin' to the family of the miner that got killed the wages he would still be makin' regularly if she hadn't sent him along as part of the escort. She's got a heart in her, at that. But she ain't got any sense. She hates blood more than she hates licker."

"How come?" Cassidy inquired. "How come that she owes money to the bank in Reynolds?"

"Because of what I just said about her not havin' any sense. She's borrowed money a few times in order to have enough ready cash to meet the payroll. Every time she's borrowed money she's started to economize on the mine's runnin' expenses. She's got just one idea of how to do it, and that's to cut down the size of the payroll. She up and fires a few more miners."

"Sounds to me," said Cassidy, "as though that ain't exactly the right way to do it, pervidin', of course, that the mine ain't peterin' out."

"She's petered some, but if they was two-three hundred miners workin', instead of maybe sixty or so, the mine would be payin' a handsome profit. The boss could afford to lose a shipment now and then. She'd still be able to put money in the bank. With due respect to the boss, y'understand, she's crazier than a bedbug out in the rain. You can't talk to her—that is, you can't advise her. She knows it all. If you ask her, she'll admit that she knows it all. So there you are!"

"Uh-huh! I kinda got an idea that way at supper time," said Cassidy slowly and thoughtfully. "She has the effect of kinda mixin' a fella's ideas into a stale hash. That proposition of hers, offerin' fifty dollars a week to me for a few weeks, and a thousand dollars reward if I ketch the bandit alive for her—and a ten per cent. cut, in addition, of any gold I can recover from the bandit's lair . . ."

A pause, during which Cassidy carefully poured out two drinks of whisky. Griggs said nothing. He concentrated on watching the pouring.

"WELL, what did you think of the proposition?" Cassidy finally inquired.

"The fifty dollars a week is fine," Griggs replied. "You'll get that. But you should have watched the sheriff's face while she was making the proposition. He had a funny look. He has a

funny look that is natural to him, but it kind of changed for a few seconds. I can't swear to it, but I got the idea that his face slipped for a moment into what you might call a sneer."

"Thasso? Gosh, I was watchin' Miss Robertson's face. She's got a funny look, too. I didn't squint at the sheriff until she ast his advice about the proposition she made to me."

"You should have watched Whiting. That ten per cent. cut is, I got an idea, what made him sneer. Sure, he told her to go ahead and hire you. He told her that she couldn't do better. That pleased her a heap. But all you'll get out of it is the fifty dollars a week—for a few weeks. That's awful big wages for what you'll be able to do."

"Thasso?" Cassidy grinned. "What makes you think that the offer of a ten per cent. cut is what made Whiting sneer?"

"Hah!" exclaimed Griggs mysteriously. "Maybe he didn't sneer, but I'm bettin' he did. The boss is crazier than a tick when it comes to havin' common sense. With due respect to her, y'understand. I ain't a man who'd say anything against his boss."

"Yeh," grinned Cassidy, "I noticed that was one of your virtues."

"Naw, it ain't!" said Griggs. "I ain't got no virtues. I don't want any. They're handicaps, that's what they are. They're as bad as principles. Now take the boss—"

"You take her," Cassidy interjected quickly, grinning. "I sure don't want her."

"G'wan! What I meant was that you can hold her up as an example of what too many principles—firm and fixed, like she says—can do to you. She ain't got more sense than to try to economize by cutting the payroll. In a couple of years, the bank in Reynolds will own the mine. Even if the robber gets ketched, she won't have any chance of payin' off the mortgage, not while her principles keep her from runnin' the mine the way it ought to be run." Griggs reached for a bottle and poured liberally. "Now, you or me, we'd run that mine with no regard for principles."

"You betcha!" Cassidy agreed, raising his glass. "Here's to principles!"

"To hell with principles!" said Griggs. "They ain't right! They sure ain't, the way the boss treats them. Them principles of her aunt's is goin' to make a pauper out of Miss Ruth. I ask you, is that right?"

"It sure ain't!" said Cassidy.

"She's the finest, sweetest li'l gal in the country," Griggs continued. "Ain't she?"

"She sure is!"

"Say, can't I get an argument out of you?"

"Nope! You sure can't! Not along any of them lines."

"In that case," said Griggs, "we might's well have another drink and then go to bed. I've had a hard day. Sunday is always a hard day for me."

"Why, I didn't know that the stage ran on Sunday."

"It don't. But I have to take supper at the house every Sunday and listen to her principles. That's what makes it a hard day."

CHAPTER V

THE JAIL

GRIGGS started snoring within two minutes after he piled into his bunk. But Cassidy lay awake, trying to think. The whole situation seemed almost preposterous, to him. Cassidy did not by any means possess a single track mind but, at best, his mental processes and reactions were elemental. If there were only one bandit it would take only one bullet to stop the banditing. And Miss Robertson's abhorrence of blood being spilled contributed largely to the bandit's being still unharmed and at large.

This bandit, Cassidy decided, could not be a hermit living up in the mountains. He was some one living right there in Oro Mañana. Cassidy reluctantly discarded

the theory that Griggs had been robbing himself. It was a fine theory, but it shattered against the fact that there were many witnesses who had seen the bandit in action. Griggs was in the clear.

But was he? The bandit had an uncanny knowledge of when a big gold shipment was going out. Perhaps Griggs had some way of signaling this information. It was a bright thought, but Cassidy did not like it. Griggs was almost venomous in expressing his suspicions about the sheriff. And the latter was in the complete confidence of Miss Robertson. There was a possibility that Griggs was right, and a larger one that Griggs was innocent.

Cassidy tried to fight off the drowsiness that stole upon him. He wanted to continue thinking. As he fell asleep he was idly wondering what became of the gold after the bandit had stolen it.

He awakened in the first dim light of dawn. Across the room Griggs was snoring lustily.

"Hey! Griggs!" Cassidy yelped. "Wake up!"

"Huh? Whatcha—didya call me?"

"I sure did!"

"What's the idea? It's too cold and early to get up. I don't pull out of town till nine o'clock."

"Tell me one thing, and you can go back to sleep."

"What's the one thing?"

"What becomes of the gold after the bandit steals it? How does it get out of the country?"

"Go ask the detective that the boss has hired."

"Who? Meanin' me? I ain't no detective."

"Who said you was? But the Pinkertons turned in a report that not a bit of gold, not accounted for legitimately, ever gets to any market. Now lemme 'lone. I'm gonna do some more shut eye." Mr. Griggs almost immediately resumed his far from lovely baritone snore.

But Cassidy was wide awake. He finally arose, lighted a fire in the small stove and rummaged around for the makings of a pot of coffee. The squealing growl of the small grinder as it worked on the hard beans finally and fully awakened Mr. Griggs. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and reluctantly started dressing. He discouraged conversation until he had lapped up his second cup of hot coffee. Both cups had been liberally laced with indigestion remedy.

They decided to have breakfast at the one remaining restaurant in town. This was Cassidy's idea. He offered to buy the breakfasts, after sizing up the slimly stocked larder in the house.

OUTSIDE, Griggs pointed downhill to a neat little cottage that stood in front of a pole corral.

"That's MacDonald's shack," said Griggs.

"Who's MacDonald?"

"The mine foreman, the *hombre* who goes to Reynolds to do most of his drinking."

"Oh!"

Cassidy allowed his gaze to linger on the blue roan in the corral, the horse that Griggs had described as a hill climbing wonder. A heavy screen of manzanitas grew along the slope to the south. This slope ended in a ravine. And the far wall of the ravine, which served as one side of the corral, was a brush topped cliff forty or fifty feet high. Cassidy idly noted that MacDonald easily could sneak away from Oro Mañana on horseback by riding through the manzanitas for a few yards and gaining the ravine.

At the edge of about a 40° incline, one hundred feet above the foreman's cottage, stood a small, obviously stanch building. It was only about eight feet square and the walls seemed to be formed of one inch boards laid flat, one above the other. The door was covered with metal, sheet iron, boiler plate, or something like that.

"Funny place to put a powder house," said Cassidy.

"Powder house, nothing!" Griggs retorted. "That's the cooler."

"Shucks!" Cassidy grinned. "I thought

this town was so danged moral that it didn't need a jail."

"Well, it ain't always been that way. In Mike Robertson's day, this town was as twice as wide open as hell. But a man would danged near have to commit a cold blooded murder in those days in order to get into that jail. She's sure a stout built little calaboose."

"Thasso? I'm goin' down for a better look. I like to look at jails—from the outside."

"That's the only way to look at that little jug. If you ever get locked in it, you'll never be able to break out." Griggs led the way, glad to be the guide toward a point of interest in the town.

The metal covered jail door was temporarily kept closed by a hasp on the outside. Griggs unfastened this. The door was four inches thick—four layers of one inch boards criss-crossed and plentifully studded with spikes on the inside. It hung on three hand wrought, massive hinges. It opened outward. Cassidy swung it on the squeaky hinges.

"She opens out," Griggs explained, "so's it would be just about impossible to batter it in."

"Thasso?" said Cassidy. "Anybody ever try it?"

"No-o. Not that I ever heard off."

"Then how do you know that it couldn't be busted in?"

"Aw, take a squint for yourself."

Cassidy squinted. He took a good long squint. He saw that the walls were six inches thick. The foundations consisted of three huge logs laid parallel. Across these had been nailed a layer of one-inch boards, on top of which in turn had been laid another layer from the other direction. Then two more layers, each crossing the other. The floor had been built four inches thick in the same manner as the door.

The walls were the ultimate in solidity, for wooden construction. A layer of one inch boards, six inches wide, had been spiked to the solid floor. Inch by inch the walls had been built up of boards laid flat on one another. Each layer had been spiked firmly to several successive layers beneath. The corners were dovetailed. There was a flat board ceiling, above which had been built a sloping shingle roof.

Cassidy quickly took in these details. He saw that a huge lock had been built into the door. The bolt was nearly one inch thick and two inches wide. When the door was locked the bolt fitted into a piece of metal that had been mortised in the center of the wall. Four connecting holes, one above the other, had been drilled through the boiler plate face of the door as a keyhole.

There was one unglazed window opening. It was about two feet wide and one foot high. Five perpendicular iron bars, spaced about four inches apart, made the opening escape proof. Each bar was nearly an inch in diameter. Cassidy saw that holes had been bored into the lower boards and the bars hammered down into them. The upper boards, with holes bored to fit, had gone home neatly over the upper ends of the rods. It was a stanch, ingenious bit of construction. To cap it, strips of half inch iron or steel had been spiked around the inside of the opening. The spike heads projected slightly from the holes that had been drilled through the heavy metal strips. The purpose of the latter, evidently, was to prevent a prisoner's friends from getting busy with a saw on a dark and stormy night.

The weak point in the jail was the ceiling. It was only two inches thick. But it was eight feet above the floor. And the boxlike jail contained no hard furniture, nothing for a prisoner to stand on while he tried to break through the ceiling. In fact, the only bit of furnishing in the room was an old mattress, which wood rats had attacked. The rats had stolen most of the excelsior stuffing and had scattered the rest about the floor.

"EVER been in Tres Pecos?" Cassidy asked Griggs.

"Nope! Never have. Why?"

"They got a wooden jail down there, too. It's a lot bigger than this one, but it

ain't one bit stronger. Say, who's the jailer here—if any."

"MacDonald, the mine foreman. He carries the key. He's s'posed to be the town marshal. But he ain't arrested nobody for over a year."

Cassidy squinted down the hill to the foreman's small cottage. It appeared flimsy compared to the solidly constructed jail. Smoke was coming from the rusty length of tinned stovepipe that served as a chimney for the cottage. MacDonald appeared in the doorway of his home.

"Hello, boys," he hailed them. "How do you like our jail."

"You ought to block up that window," Griggs replied. "The wood rats have stole the furniture."

"What's the difference?" said MacDonald. "Nobody ever uses it."

"That's too bad, ain't it?" Griggs laughed. "Come on," he said to Cassidy. "Let's go before he spoils my appetite."

"What's the matter? Don't you like him?" Cassidy inquired.

"Oh, we get along, but I ain't chummy with him."

"Why?" Cassidy persisted.

"Well, maybe it's because he's never bought me a drink. And he cheats the stage by riding that horse you see down there in the corral. He's never paid a cent to ride to Reynolds on the stage like a gentleman. So I don't mix with him none."

"Oh, I see."

Cassidy chuckled at the stage driver's viewpoint. They came to a street and walked along it to the restaurant. The sheriff's horse was tied to the hitchrack in front. The sheriff came out of the restaurant, nodded to them, then mounted his horse and rode away. He was heading back over the trail to Pinkerton City, the county seat.

Cassidy tilted his hat forward and scratched the back of his head as he watched the sheriff disappear.

"Whatsa matter?" Griggs inquired. "I got a bottle of stuff up to the house. You can rub some of it on your head and after that you won't have to scratch that way."

"G'wan!" Cassidy retorted, grinning feebly. "I was only tryin' to think."

"About the sheriff?"

"Kinda. But I'm too danged sober to think. Le's go in and eat."

CHAPTER VI

SUSPECTS

MR. GRIGGS promptly at nine o'clock yelped "Gid-dap!" to the four horses hitched to the stage. There was one outbound passenger aboard, a rough looking, burly man who carried a roll of blankets as the greater part of his baggage. Cassidy wondered whether this man were the one who had been in the front room of the saloon the night before.

"Quick work!" he murmured, grinning. "It's sure quick work if he's the *hombre* that the boss caught with a foot on the rail. It sure is."

He grinned again as the burly individual looked back and thumbed his nose at the town.

Cassidy thought of the fifty dollars he had been promised for trying to do some detective work during the coming week. He felt absolutely helpless.

"Oh, well," he decided, "I reckon that detectives mostly feel that way, but they never let on about it. All they do, mostly, is to look wise. But, shucks, I hate to take the money from them women, at that. So I'm sure gonna try to earn it."

He walked away from the livery stable that served as the stage depot. His feet, perhaps unconsciously, led him down the alley to the back door of the saloon. The door was locked.

"Huh! Frank doesn't close too early, accordin' to Griggs. Accordin' to Cassidy, he doesn't open too early, either."

His feet had an idea; they led him over to Griggs' cottage, where there were two partially filled bottles. He sat down, rolled a cigaret and tried to think. No result. He took a drink of whisky, then another; finally a third. He waited for an

idea to come. Feeling vaguely baffled, he strolled over to the livery stable and saddled his horse. He asked for directions and rode out along the trail to Pinkerton City.

IT DID not take him long to verify the report that it was a rough trail. Rough, rocky, winding, steep, narrow and, in some places, dangerous. In other places there was no trail visible at all. Cassidy dropped the reins on the saddle horn and trusted to the instinct of his horse to pick a path over the bare rocky places and find the trail on the other side. At noon he rode into Pinkerton City and discovered an old friend.

The old friend was one Bill Collier. Collier was the ex-sheriff of Pinkerton County. He was now the main partner in the company that had a monopoly on the stage and freighting business from Pinkerton City to the railroad. He was the very active manager of the said company.

"We-ell, for the love of buffalo humps, look what blew in," drawled Collier, his face a wide grin. "As you used to say, Slivers, I got a good idea; le's go have a drink."

"Nope! Not till you tell me who's watchin' the front doors of all these saloons I see in town. How are you, Bill? When did you blow in here? I ain't seen you since the spring of '85. Or maybe it was '84."

"It was '83," said Bill.

"There you go, allus arguin', same as you usta."

They shook hands, grinning in sheer pleasure as they looked into each other's eyes at close range.

"What was the josh you meant by askin' about the front doors of the saloons being' watched?" Collier inquired seriously.

"Oh, that's force of habit. I'm workin' for Miss Robertson—over at Oro Mañana."

"How long you been workin' there?"

"Since yesterday—since last night. I'm a detective."

"The hell you are!"

"Well, I'm bein' paid for pretendin' to be one, anyway."

"Le's go have a drink and chew the rag a while."

"Not unless we can go in a back door. I catches habits awful easy."

Collier laughed as Cassidy dismounted and tied his horse at the rail in front of a saloon.

"It ain't right," Cassidy maintained. Nevertheless he followed Bill through the swinging doors. "I oughtn't to go in bold, this way. I might forget and do it in Oro Mañana. Then I'd lose my job."

"First time I ever heard you worry about losin' a job," said Collier.

"That's because you ain't seen me for five-six—nope! It's seven years. I've turned serious, Bill. Honest to gosh I have."

"Don't try to fool me, Slivers. You haven't sense enough to get serious."

Cassidy grinned feebly, unable to frame a suitable retort. Collier ordered two shots of Bourbon.

"If you're doin' detective work for Oro Mañana, what you doin' over here?" Collier inquired.

"Why, I come over to get a line on the sheriff—Whiting."

"You've come to headquarters," said Collier. "I'm the lad who made him sheriff. I had the job, but I wished it off on him. Whiting's all right when you get to know him."

"How well do you know him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he's a suspect. He's suspected of havin' a hand in robbin' the Oro Mañana stage."

"The hell he is! Who suspects him?"

"Griggs, the stage driver."

Collier let out a whoop; he slapped his thigh; he almost howled in glee.

"What's so danged funny?" Cassidy demanded.

"Nothin'—only Whiting's chief suspect is *Griggs*."

"Oh, you know something about those robberies?"

"Know about 'em? Hell, I almost

invented 'em. Whiting tells me everything and asks my advice."

"What do you advise him?"

"To marry the niece," grinned Collier, "and then to bring her over here to live, which would save him all them long rides he's takin' all the time. And Miss Robertson would make a little money out of that mine if Whiting becomes her nephew-in-law."

"How come?"

"When he goes over there now he's steppin' on aigs. Yep, he sure steps soft and says 'yes, ma'am' nice and smooth when Miss Robertson is around, which she always is. That ain't Whiting's reg'lar nature at all. Uh-uh! He tells me that the old dame sort of addles his nerves. And she never gives him a chance to be alone with the girl."

"She's sure the nerve addlin' kind," Cassidy agreed. "But how would Whiting save her money or let her make some money out of the mine if the girl become Mrs. Whiting?"

"That's easy. He'd get his nerve back. He'd just natch'ly up and protect those shipments with some gun throwin' lads who drink hard licker any time it's within reach. Say, did you hear about the elections over in Oro Mañana?"

"Nope! What about 'em?"

"Why, every year Miss Robertson tries to vote that one saloon out of business. She goes on a house to house campaign. She gets enough promises to blot the town dry. Along comes election day—*and the vote is wet as hell!* Haw-haw-haw!"

"That's nawthin' to laugh about," said Cassidy. "It's awful serious to her. It works out jest like her house to house program to increase the church attendance. Dawggone it, Bill, the more I hear about that dame the more sorry I feel for her. I don't like her none, but that don't stop me from feelin' sorry. You heard about her principles, ain't you?"

"Firm and fixed," said Collier, grinning. "Whiting's told me about 'em—often."

"WITH due respect to her, you understand, like Griggs says, I agree with you that she's a mild lunatic. But just the same, Bill, you gotta respect a person who sticks up for principles, right or wrong, like she does. I'm tellin' you, Bill, I'm gettin' kinda tired of hearin' people josh about her ways and methods. In a way she's got good stuff in her. You gotta admit that?"

"Well, maybe," Collier admitted. "But you're the first one to find it out. What makes you say so?"

"Uh! Mebbe it's jest because I'm workin' for her."

"You win! Le's have another drink," said Collier.

Cassidy approved of this idea. They had several drinks.

"So you think I'd better discard Whiting as a suspect?" Cassidy finally said.

"Sure. He's as innocent as hell. He couldn't possibly be the bandit. When he's over there, there ain't no robbery. When he's right here in town, where I can keep an eye on him, there's another holdup of the Oro Mañana stage."

"You're sure about that?"

"Absolutely."

"In that case, Bill, I hope you don't mind if I nominate you for a while?"

"Nominate me? For what?"

"For a suspect. You don't seem to get the idea, Bill. I'm s'posed to be a detective. And a detective's gotta have a suspect to watch, ain't he?"

"I dunno."

"Well, you ask any good detective about it. He'll tell you that I got the right idea. Here you went and took Whiting away from me, so to speak, as a suspect. You can't leave my detectin' up in the air like that. I've gotta have a suspect. So I'm suspectin' you for a while. I like the idea of suspectin' you." A grin. "Le's have another drink."

"You're drunk now," said Collier.

"Who? Me?"

"Yes, *you!*"

"Thasso? Well, I gotta have a suspect."

"All right. I'll give you one. I'll give you a good one. I'll nominate Mac-

Donald, the mine foreman. You go and suspect him for a while. He's Whiting's best friend. He's the town marshal over at Oro Mañana. I leave it to you, didn't I give you a lulu of a suspect?"

Cassidy shut one eye and squinted thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"Not bad, at that, Bill. Not half bad. Thanks! Le's have another drink."

"No!" Bill took his elbow from the bar and his foot from the rail. "You see, Slivers, we got a different kind of whisky here in Pinkerton, the kind you ain't accustomed to."

"Well, it sure is pretty raw."

Collier grinned.

"Maybe it is," he conceded, "but you miss the real point about the whisky we got here. You don't have to drink all the whisky here at one time. Some of it will keep till next time. It won't spoil. And I've got business to tend to right now. You know how it is."

"Sure."

Cassidy followed Bill to the door and out to the narrow wooden sidewalk. He was aware that Bill was trying to keep him halfway sober. He grinned at the idea. The situation was being reversed, for years before he had taken it upon himself on numerous occasions to try to keep Bill Collier sober. He laughed out loud.

"WHAT'S the joke?" Bill inquired. Cassidy told him. Bill laughed with him.

"Uh-uh! No, sirree!" said Cassidy. "If I hadn't seen you workin' crude like you did to keep me from havin' another li'l drink, I wouldn't 'a' believed it. I sure wouldn't. But I appreciate it, Bill. You know the effect of that high powered stuff they sell in there better than I do. I'm takin' your word for it."

"I was afraid you wouldn't," said Bill. "C'mon over to my office."

"Why? You got a bottle over there?" hopefully.

"No, I haven't. I don't tempt myself any more."

"Thasso? Then I'm goin back to work. I oughta feel insulted at you, but I don't."

"You shouldn't," said Bill. "I've reformed—almost. But you're just a walkin' temptation. I like to drink with you. I always did like to. C'mon over to the office and wait a while. After I get through with business—"

"After you get through with business I won't be here in town," Cassidy interrupted. "No, Bill—" sadly—"these reunions with an old bunky always end up the same way. I like you too much, Bill, to let you get drunk on my account. I'm headin' right back to Oro Mañana. I'm doin' it jest to keep you sober, y'understand. Besides, I got a nice brand new suspect to take back in my mind. I'm goin' back to try to put the deadwood on this MacDonald."

"It's a better idea than maybe you think it is," said Bill.

"What makes you say that?"

"MacDonald was one of them fellers what put up money to help Mike Robertson develop the mine. He quit cold on Mike finally. And when Mike found him, years later, to pay him back, with full interest, the money he'd put in, this MacDonald raised quite a holler, claimin' he had a share in the mine. Mike convinced him otherwise, so to speak. But MacDonald was still oratin' about the dirty deal he said he'd got, when Mike died. Mike had made MacDonald mine foreman, but Mac was doin' a lot of talkin' in his cups behind Mike's back."

"So? Huh! Thanks, Bill! I reckon that makes him a lulu of a suspect. I'll treat him that way."

And Cassidy, half filled with whisky, and much more than half full of suspicion against the mine foreman, rode back toward Oro Mañana.

CHAPTER VII

THE RÔLE OF SOLOMON

GRIGGS, the first suspect, had been put in the clear. Cassidy and the sheriff had both suspected Griggs. Griggs had suspected the sheriff. And Bill Collier had spoken for the sheriff.

Cassidy felt absolutely baffled when finally he was forced to give up MacDonald, the mine foreman, as a ripe suspect. The foreman stayed in the mine every day, which cleared him. In addition, there was the fact that MacDonald was broke between paydays. He used his credit to get whisky at the local saloon. No rich stage robber would be forced to do that. This was Cassidy's reasoning.

Several days passed, with Cassidy still in the position of not having a logical suspect. He went to Miss Robertson.

"Ma'am," he said, "I'm goin' back to the ranch. I ain't doin' no good here. And I don't want any wages for the last week. I ain't earned them."

"You will earn them tomorrow, Mr. Cassidy," she replied.

"Thasso? That's good news. What do I do?"

"You will protect the shipment I am sending out. I have not sent a shipment for eleven days now."

"Yeh, I was wonderin' about it. I thought you shipped every week."

"I have held it up a few days to make it a richer bait. You understand, Mr. Cassidy, that I am absolutely *against* bloodshed—"

"Yes, ma'am; I gathered that that was one of your firm and fixed principles." Cassidy kept his face straight.

"It is, indeed! But my niece has convinced me that our only salvation is to place things absolutely in your hands."

"Good girl!" said Cassidy, grinning.

"Sir?"

"I meant Miss Ruth."

"Oh! But really she is not a good girl. She is extremely impertinent. And she has shocked me beyond words with her disregard for the conventions."

"She has? Ain't that awful?"

Miss Robertson looked pained.

"I can't believe it, ma'am," Cassidy continued. "I ain't got much regard for them convention things, myself, but I ain't noticed Miss Ruth bustin' any of 'em, beyond her bein' a little sassy. But that's jest because she's real bright."

"She secreted them from me." Miss Robertson's voice dropped almost to a whisper. "But I discovered them and hid them securely where she will not find them. At the first opportunity I shall drop them in the stove."

"Gosh! Excuse me, Miss Robertson, but I don't quite savvy your drift. What did you hide and what are you gonna put in the stove?"

"A pair of pants!" This in a dramatic whisper. "She got them from a mail order house, unknown to me. She wears them when she goes riding on horseback. You may not believe it, Mr. Cassidy, but she rides astride!"

"She does? Good for her! Tha's the only sensible way to ride. You see, ma'am, I reckon you ain't been out in the range country none. To fork a bronc is the only way to ride it. All the women does it. That is, almost all of 'em. A side saddle is a reg'lar curiosity in the cow country. So, if that's what you call bustin' the conventions, I wouldn't take it too hard, ma'am. But I ain't seen her ridin' any."

"That is because I have hidden those outrageous trousers. And to get back to business, Mr. Cassidy, on tomorrow morning's stage I am sending out an ingot which represents the output of ten days. I desire you to pursue Mr. Whiting's tactics, namely, to ride on your horse some distance behind the stage. That will, I hope, prove sufficient to prevent a robbery."

"Huh! Say, ma'am, I thought you said that you was gonna leave things in my hands?"

"I shall do so willingly, if you will avoid bloodshed," she replied.

"So you sent for me jest to have me be a guard for this shipment?"

"Not exactly. I did hope that you might discover the identity of the criminal."

"And if I did, what would you want me to do, pat him on the back?" Sarcasm dripped heavily from every word. Cassidy was annoyed. "I'll take a couple of sody biscuits with me," he continued. "If I meet up with this bandit, this

hombre who's killed three men and gunned up some others, I'll throw the biscuits at him and consider that I've done my duty. You say you don't want no blood spilled. Jest s'pose, ma'am, that this robber and murderer wants to spill my blood? I'm gonna object kinda strong to that. I sure am! In fact, if the only way to keep my skin from gettin' holes in it is to object first—with bullets—and argue about it afterwards—" he hesitated.

"I see your viewpoint, of course," she interrupted, "but I had hoped—"

"Yeh, you'd hoped—what?"

"That you might be able to obtain the drop on this criminal and arrest him."

"With a coupla sody biscuits? Say, looky here, ma'am, I think that the best thing all around is for me to head right back for my ranch. It'll be a lot safer for me to do that, and it'll keep you from worryin' about any blood bein' spilled. Savvy? I'm gonna do that li'l thing right now. Jest say goodby to Miss Ruth for me. S'long!"

Cassidy stalked toward the door.

"I THINK that you are a coward!" Miss Robertson fairly spat out the words. "Do not go!"

Cassidy stopped and turned toward her, his fingers fumbling awkwardly with his hat to cover his mixed state of mind. The skin of his face was tingling. He wanted to be angry, but he wilted as the stern, acid toned spinster burst into tears.

"Oh!" she wailed. "You don't understand—"

"Understand what, ma'am?"

"You—d-d-don't understand how much depends on you."

The words came in a rush. Her usually bleak face was bleaker than ever. It was screwed and contorted into queer knots as she endeavored to control the tears. She managed to speak.

"Ruth has such faith in you. She thinks you are something like a magician when it comes to smoothing out troubles and uncovering mysteries. She has told me that you have managed to send numerous criminals to the penitentiary. She thinks you are a wizard."

"I ain't nawthin' of the kind, ma'am! I been lucky—sometimes. I sort of stumble on to things—and then folks give me credit for bein' a lot of things that I ain't. No foolin', I ain't no wizard. Uh-uh! I sure ain't!"

Cassidy shook his head in denial; but he felt vaguely flattered.

He jerked his head around as the doorknob rattled. Ruth entered. She slammed the door behind her.

"Where did you hide them?" she demanded abruptly, angrily.

The words were flung at her aunt before the girl noticed that Cassidy was in the office. Ruth's face was flushed, but turned even a deeper red when she saw Cassidy.

Cassidy had no difficulty in guessing to what the girl referred. He grinned widely.

"You better work fast," he laughed. "She's gonna burn 'em, but she ain't done it yet."

"She'd better not! If she does, I'll—I'll run away."

"Thasso?" Cassidy was calm. He was beginning to enjoy himself. "Where'll you run to, and what'll you do after you get there?"

"You keep still!" she flared. "This is none of your affair!"

"Thasso? Well, I've sure been let in on the inside of it. You don't wanta jump me that way. I jest been puttin' in a lotta time defendin' your tryin' to wear them pants."

Cassidy mentally ducked. He wished that he was far, far away from there. He expected to be jumped from both sides. But, much to his surprise, he was not. Instead, he figuratively became the rock upon which both women simultaneously leaned. They leaned so hard that they almost wrecked him. He furtively ran his tongue around his dry lips as with one hand he wiped moisture from his brow.

Words flowed freely, but Cassidy said none of them. The two women needed no assistance when it came to spouting

words. Each ignored the other; both spoke and argued at the same time. Cassidy was the mutual target. He glanced in turn several times at each of them. It finally struck him that he was in no physical danger, and his sense of humor arose to his rescue. He made the peace sign, his hand up, palm outward. The words ceased.

"SAY, LADIES," he drawled, "I jest said I didn't want last week's wages, because I hadn't earned 'em. Wasn't that fair enough."

"It was, if you said it," Ruth agreed, "but what has that to do with my pants that auntie hid on me?"

"Plenty," said Cassidy, grinning. "I take it that I'm s'posed to settle the right or wrong of these here arguments. I jest wanted to plant in both your minds that I shoots straight and fair. I can think up a lotta ideas for and against your arguments, but I'd like to let you all out the easiest way—includin' me. Will you take my word for things?"

They half suspiciously agreed.

"If there's any more arguments," he continued, "I'm gonna come right out and demand my wages for last week. These arguments bein' put up to me is an awful strain on my judgment. I can see only one way to settle 'em. You, Miss Robertson, you went and hid out Miss Ruth's pants on her."

"I did."

"Well, you wanta remember you ain't in the East now, and that pants is all right in their place."

"They have no place on a woman's limbs!" Miss Robertson retorted.

"N'mind that argument. Right now I'm Old Man Solomon himself. You went and hid them pants. You told me you did. You said you hid 'em good. All right. If Miss Ruth can't find 'em, you win the argument. If she finds where you hid 'em she wins the right to wear 'em."

Miss Robertson started to protest. Cassidy stopped her.

"You put it up to me, didn't you? Well, I gave you my decision. If you're gonna argue any more I'm jest gonna fork my hoss and head right back home. I can get enough arguments outa my pardner. Miss Ruth can wear them pants if she finds 'em. That's my decision. If there's any more words outa either of you, you can find somebody else to ride along with that shipment tomorrow."

"But, Mr. Cassidy—" Miss Robertson began.

"But nawthin'," he interrupted. "You takes my decision or you don't! Goodby!" Cassidy walked out.

He hastened toward the saloon. By this time his state of mind was such that he boldly walked right in through the front door. He planted his left elbow on the bar and his left foot on the brass rail. He used his right forefinger to point at his right ear.

"You see that ear, Frank?" he said to the bartender.

"Sure I see it."

"Well, I got an awful pain in it. What do you prescribe as a cure?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOLDUP

SOMETIME during the night there had been a pistol shot in Oro Mañana. But no one seemed to have heard it. The miners went to work at seven o'clock in the morning. At 7:15, MacDonald, the mine foreman, knocked on the door of the cottage where Miss Robertson and her niece were preparing their breakfast.

Ruth opened the door.

"What do you want, Mac?" she inquired.

"I want to see the boss," he replied. Then he saw Miss Robertson's face peering over the girl's shoulder.

"Breck did not show up for work," he announced. "So I went over to his cabin to see why. He's layin' dead in his bunk. He's been shot right through the head."

Swansy Breck was, or had been, the assistant foreman of the mine. He had obtained his nickname because of the frequency with which he referred to Swansea, his birthplace in Wales.

MacDonald's announcement sufficed to spoil the appetites of the women. Miss Ruth ran all of the way to Griggs' cottage. Breathlessly she told Cassidy the facts that MacDonald had given out about Breck's death.

"You better inform the sheriff, or the coroner, or somebody," he said. "But I'll do that for you. You better go back to your aunt."

She went.

Cassidy with Griggs as the guide, hastened immediately to the little cabin where the assistant mine foreman lay dead in his bunk. Breck had lived alone in the cabin. The pillow on his bunk was a fifty pound flour sack stuffed with straw. Breck lay flat on his back, the blankets half thrown aside. Powder burns surrounded the black hole in his right temple. Blood had oozed down across his cheek and stained the pillow. His right arm hung over the edge of the low bunk. His right hand, knuckles down, lay on the floor. A scant two inches from the ends of the fingers lay a short barreled "Bulldog" revolver, of British manufacture.

"It looks like he'd committed suicide," said Griggs.

"Yeh, it does—kinda," Cassidy agreed.

He stooped to pick up the revolver. He handled it gingerly and then replaced it in the exact position he had found it.

"You know this town, Griggs. You know the people in it. Did you know this man very well?"

"Not well enough to be able to think of any reasons why he'd bump himself off," said Griggs. "It looks like suicide, like I said. Right now I'm takin' a second look and a second think—but they ain't gettin' me anywhere."

"All right," said Cassidy. "Let's go."

He carefully closed the door behind him as they went out.

"GRIGGS, what's the best way to get word to the sheriff and the coroner?"

"I guess that the best way is for me to take a message to send from Reynolds. It can be telegraphed up the line and then over to Pinkerton. That's the best way, unless you want to ride over the trail."

"I don't!" said Cassidy. "I heard it was a darned hard trail to ride."

"It's a danged good saddle trail," said Griggs. "Don't that danged fool sheriff come prancin' over it all the time?"

"Let him do it," said Cassidy. "Shucks! I seen the wires leadin' outa here to Reynolds, and I thought—"

"Them wires ain't workin'. They ain't been workin' for danged near three years—not since the owner of the *Gazette* hit the breeze out of town because his credit wasn't good no more. He'd hung on as long's he could. But he'd run out of paper to print his paper on, and the boss quit backin' him. The danged fool had come right out in print and blamed the boss for what had happened to the town. Yep! He said Oro Mañana was dead because the boss had killed it. I didn't blame him for that—he'd only told the truth—so I give him a free ride when he showed up on the road a mile or so out of town."

"N'mind that," said Cassidy. "I understand that the wires ain't workin' since he left."

"They sure ain't. Nobody knows how to telegraph."

"Well, when you get to Reynolds, you wire the sheriff, you understand? Jest tell him the facts as you know 'em."

"Sure, I'll do that; but who pays for the message?"

"Aw, charge it to the boss or anybody else you wanta. Don't worry me with details. I'm doin' a lotta thinkin' right now."

"What are you thinkin' about?"

"Well, I was wonderin' more than I was thinkin'."

"What was you wonderin' about?"

"I was wonderin' how much indigestion remedy you got on your hip. Frank won't open up his place for a coupla hours yet."

Griggs offered his flask.

PROMPTLY at nine o'clock that morning, Griggs as usual yelped "giddap!" to the four horses hitched to the stage. About three minutes after that, Cassidy rode his horse out through the livery stable door and headed for the Reynolds road.

A short distance out of town, the road curved abruptly to the right to go around and along the side of a peak. When Cassidy reached this point he was looking to the left, to where he could see the road above him. In the half mile around the side of the peak, the road ascended about two hundred feet. This half mile of road was not visible from where Cassidy reined in his horse and considered the possibilities of a short cut. He remembered that horseshoe curve of the road around the peak as being very steep. He rolled a cigaret, and as he rolled it he saw the stage pull into sight.

It was less than one hundred and fifty yards from where he sat on his horse to where the vehicle came into his line of vision. This distance was a very stiff climb, but looked as if it were easily negotiable for a mountain horse. The stage road went around the far side of the peak in order to gain altitude with a minimum grade. Once around the peak, and having gained the necessary altitude, the road, for one third of a mile, went almost in a straight line and on a level grade. along the side of a steep, rocky ridge.

Cassidy voted unanimously in favor of the short cut. He saw no sense in traveling half a mile around the peak in order to gain a point one hundred and fifty yards away. He turned his horse off the road and headed it straight along the short arc of the side of the peak for the road above him. The short cut was very steep but, at that, easily negotiable for a saddle horse. Cassidy was just beginning to congratulate himself upon having saved himself several hundreds of yards of riding—and then he discovered the catch in it.

The catch was a deep little arroyo that had not been visible from where he had left the road to take the short cut. The miniature cañon was only six or seven feet deep. Its width was about the same distance. But its walls were almost perpendicular. Cassidy did not have to pull in his horse at the brink. The horse stopped. Cassidy looked up and down the arroyo. Downhill the crevice grew deeper and deeper, wider and wider. A few yards uphill it ended in a blank, perpendicular wall of rock. The horse that Cassidy had left in Reynolds was his own personal and favorite mount. The horse he was riding was the pick of the string at the Plus One ranch. A mountain bred horse is almost as sure footed as a goat. It can negotiate safely spots where the average livery stable animal, accustomed to good roads and bridle paths, would kill itself and probably its rider.

But even a range cayuse has its limitations. One good look sufficed to tell the sad tale to Cassidy. The short cut had turned out to be worse than a gamble, and he had drawn a complete blank. To be sure, he had considered the possibility of his horse's being able to leap across the narrow arroyo, but had dismissed it almost instantly. The steep slope, on which the horse at times was forced to scramble for a foothold, forbade any chance of the speed and momentum necessary to a successful leap. There was nothing to do except to return to the stage road.

WHEN he finally regained the highway he realized that the stage was by that time perhaps a mile and a half ahead of him. He snapped his horse into a smart trot and finally, as he neared the level stretch along the ridge, into a gallop. His one idea was again to catch sight of the stage. Through his ignorance of local topography he had lost a lot of time. He used the spurs on that level stretch along the side of the ridge. At that, however, he did not dream that a holdup had taken place or would take place.

Furthermore, he did not know that from higher up in the mountains his departure from Oro Mañana had been watched, and that his attempt at taking

a short cut had brought a derisive smile from the watcher. The holdup had been staged on the first bit of steep grade, around the first turn, not much more than one hundred yards from the end of the level, straight stretch along the side of the ridge.

Griggs had been held up so often that it had almost become a mere formality to him. He pulled in the horses, to prevent one of them from being shot. His right foot jammed down the brake to the last notch as he raised his hands. The bandit, a menacing figure in a full length black slicker, a white flour sack, with eyeholes cut in it, over his head, motioned with a Colt for Griggs to climb down. There was one outward bound passenger, evidently a drummer, who was likewise easily intimidated.

He was ordered to climb out and to hold up his hands.

"Throw out the gold!" a husky, disguised voice commanded.

Griggs complied, stepping up on the wheel hub again to reach for the strap iron reinforced box that contained the bar of gold. There was not even a padlock on the box. Miss Robertson had run short of padlocks. They did no good, anyway; the bandit would be delayed only temporarily by a padlock. Without a padlock, the undamaged box would be left at the side of the road in good condition. Griggs fully expected to pick it up again on his return trip.

"Some day," said Griggs to the bandit, "you're gonna stick me up once too often. Me? I ain't ever gonna try to fight you. I want to live a while longer. But worms —with due respect to my boss, you understand—worms is said to turn, sometimes, sooner or later."

Griggs was talking against time. He was trying to delay things. Furtively, he cast a glance back toward the turn in the road. At any moment he expected to see Cassidy ride into view. He kept on talking—or tried to.

"All that's let you keep on stagin' holdups regular is that the boss don't want any blood spilled. She's apt to get over that foolish notion one of these days. Then she'll—"

"Aw, shut up!" the bandit ordered. "Climb up and drive on."

He motioned with his Colt for the passenger to get back into the stage.

Griggs sighed as again he looked toward the turn in the road behind the stage. He took his time in climbing back to the driver's seat. He seemed to have some difficulty in disentangling the reins from the half hitch he had thrown over the turns he had taken around the brake lever. Slowly and leisurely he finally gathered in the slack. He looked again at the bandit.

"Shake a leg!" was the order.

Griggs did. He kicked loose the brakes as the horses thrust their weight into their collars. Griggs was thinking. That husky voice? The bandit had spoken exactly fifteen words, which was about twice as many as usual. The voice was disguised, of course. Thus Griggs reasoned. But there was, despite the assumed huskiness, something vaguely familiar about it. Griggs tried to loosen his brain by shaking his head. There was no result. He looked back as the stage passed around the next curve. He caught a last glimpse of the masked, slicker covered figure. The bandit now had a carbine in his hands.

A minute later, from the rear, Griggs heard the loud bark of the carbine. Then another, followed almost immediately by the still louder bang of a Colt. His state of mind became one of curiosity mixed with worry. But he did not dare to go back to investigate, much as he wanted to. As Griggs had often bluntly stated, he was a stage driver; that was all. His specialty was handling horses, not guns.

CHAPTER IX

QUESTIONS

CASSIDY, not worried a bit, but in haste, nevertheless, to regain sight of the stage, had forced his horse at a smart pace up the grade and around the turn to the scene of the robbery.

His first knowledge of anything wrong came with the abrupt belch of smoke from a point not much over one hundred yards ahead, from a thicket of mixed chaparral growth about twenty feet above the side of the road.

Cassidy's horse stumbled abruptly and fell. As the horse was going down, Cassidy managed to disengage his right foot from the stirrup and tried to use his left foot as a lever to assist him in leaping clear. He had no time at all in which to do any thinking. Getting his right foot loose had been purely instinctive. He had wanted to make one swift scrambling dive for the brush at his left; but all four legs of the horse had buckled beneath it. The animal plunged forward, struck the road with its chest and fell heavily to the right. Cassidy's left foot, still in the stirrup, received such a severe jerk that he was thrown over the body of the animal. He landed heavily on his right ear and shoulder. His right hand was trying to get his Colt out of the holster.

The bandit's second shot had been at nothing but an impenetrable cloud of dust. Cassidy's one shot from his Colt had been an accident. His thumb had slipped from the hammer, while his forefinger, having found its place and acting instinctively in that brief moment, was holding the trigger down. The bullet had gone somewhere into space, not anywhere near the bandit.

Cassidy desired cover—and lots of it. In the midst of the sheltering cloud of dust he had arisen, dazed, sick from the shock of his fall. He fell again. His left ankle would not bear his weight. He managed to scramble and crawl into the brush at the side of the road.

For a time he lay there, face down, panting for breath, trying to collect his scattered wits. He felt sick and sore and numb in various parts of his anatomy. Momentarily he was safe from the bullets of the man who had bushwhacked him. Dimly he realized this fact. He tried to think out what his next move would be, but the attempt at thinking brought only a wish. He wished that he was far away.

Another attempt to think brought to his mind Swansy Breck lying dead in his bunk. Clearly he visioned the hole in Breck's temple, the edges pitted with black powder burns. It was not a pretty picture, but it persisted in staying with him for several moments until he had shaken off the half dazed feeling that had been the result of his fall. With an effort he brought his mind back to his own immediate danger. It was not Cassidy's nature to lie still and wait for danger to come to him.

As Cassidy started crawling through the brush on hands and knees he was still trying to figure out the reason why his horse had been shot. His ankle hurt acutely, even when he was crawling. He stopped and mechanically reached up with one hand to tilt his hat forward over one eye in order to be able to scratch the back of his head as he usually did when puzzled. Much to his surprise he discovered that his hat was missing. So he scratched his head twice.

"Gosh, I must 'a' lost it over in the road," he decided.

Ten or twelve minutes later he crawled quietly to the side of the road. He had made his way through the brush for what he judged to be something over one hundred and fifty yards. He figured that he had passed the point from which the two shots had been fired. He listened, then cautiously stuck his head out to reconnoiter. He heard nothing and saw nothing. So, Colt in hand, eyes and ears alert, he crawled across the road. He drew a long breath of relief and passed a dusty hand across his moist forehead when he had gained the shelter of the brush on the other side of the road.

Slowly, cautiously, he wormed his way toward the place from which he had been ambushed. He found the very spot where the gunman had lain. It was marked by two empty .44-40 cartridges.

"Golly," said Cassidy. "Here I went to all that trouble and expense of Injunin' up here, and that son of a beehive, whoever he is, is out right now a-tryin' to Injun up on me. Only I ain't there. I'm

right here. I'm crippled and I'm mad. You betcha I'm mad! If that son of a beehive comes back here he's gonna find out jest how mad I am. You betcha!"

Cassidy reached mechanically for the makings of a cigaret. He abruptly changed his mind when he discovered what he was doing. He wanted a smoke, he wanted a drink; but he wanted most of all just one glimpse of the bushwhacker. He did not dare to smoke; he could not get a drink; so he lay there listening and hoping. He could see his dead horse lying in the dusty road, but his lost hat was not in sight.

His eager ears heard nothing. They heard the same thing for nearly half an hour. By that time he had exhausted his store of hope and patience. He crawled toward the top of the ridge. Once there, he ventured to pull himself erect by the aid of a scrub oak. He could see a lot of scenery on both sides. Then his eyes caught a bit of movement.

SOME one, who had been leaning over or stooping, had just straightened erect. Cassidy trembled with a desire to burn powder. He raised his Colt. But common sense told him that the target was far out of range for accurate shooting with a Colt. His anger said that it might be done, at that. Common sense argued back to the effect that attempting to hit a target at over two hundred yards with a Colt might spoil the chances of a shot later at close range.

"Doggone it!" Cassidy argued with himself. "I have hit things at that range."

"Yes, but how many misses—bad misses—have you made when you used your Colt at targets at that range?" Thus argued common sense.

Common sense won. Cassidy reluctantly gave up the idea of trying for a fluke shot or lucky hit. And then the person far down the slope momentarily turned toward him. Cassidy gasped. Perspiration burst forth on his brow. In fact he broke into a good all around sweat. Absolutely, beyond a doubt, he recognized the girl—Ruth Robertson.

"Uh! Golly!" Cassidy exclaimed, aghast as he realized how near he had come to cutting loose with a bullet or two. "Oh, gosh! I sure feel sick!"

He tried, vainly, to establish that his eyes had deceived him. But he had good eyes, and the visibility was exceptionally good. The harder he stared the more positive he became of her identity.

He saw her stoop over again, to arise finally and disappear in the brush. He stood, watching, marking the spot by various landmarks, so that he would be able to locate it again, after he had made his way down the slope. He saw that the intervening brush was almost impassable. A minute later he saw the girl's head above the brush. It was evident, from the movement, that she was now on horseback. For a moment he was frankly puzzled.

"Gosh," he muttered, "there must be a trail down there. There sure must be! And if there's a trail down there, I'm tellin' you, Slivers, that it ain't for any good purpose! And I reckon that you and me, Slivers, had better slide down there to do a li'l investigatin' on our own hook."

Cassidy had thought that the brush was almost impassable. In many places it was. At one point he wriggled downhill on his stomach, beneath the brush, for ten yards—only to discover that he had reached a blind alley. He had extreme difficulty in turning around in order to retrace his snake's progress. He had gone down the hill like a snake; he returned like a snail. He detoured, he crawled again, he crept, he arose and limped; again and again he retraced his steps; he went over the brush, through the brush and under the brush; he sweated and cursed—and made very little progress.

Three quarters of an hour later he came to a trail that had been slashed through the brush with an ax, but he had lost his bearings. He went the wrong way, until finally he realized that he was going away from the nearly level little opening where he had seen the girl stooping over.

He found the small clearing, a spot about seven feet square, that had been brushed out with an ax. Horse droppings lay thick in this opening. At the far side lay the dried, withered branches and bits of brush that had been hacked away, quite a sizable heap. It was in front of them that Cassidy had seen the girl stooping. He stooped, but his bad ankle hurt so much that he dropped to his knees. He lifted an armful of the dry brush. His jaw dropped a full inch and remained that way for several seconds as he stared unbelievingly at what he discovered.

HE HAD uncovered three articles—a long black slicker, a dejected, soiled flour sack with two eyeholes cut in it, and a rusty .44-40 carbine. He lifted the gun and sniffed at the muzzle. It had been fired recently.

Cassidy as yet did not know that the stage had been held up, but he began to suspect it. He carefully replaced the twigs on top of what he called a complete banditin' outfit. He used his jackknife to cut two branches from a large manzanita, crooked heavy branches. He trimmed them to suitable lengths to serve as crude, makeshift crutches. And as he started painfully and slowly hobbling along the trail in the direction of Oro Mañana his mind hurt him worse than his ankle. His mind hurt because he hated to suspect Ruth Robertson of having shot his horse and trying to kill him. He screwed his brains around into several different positions, but from every angle the evidence still seemed to point to the girl as the bushwhacker.

He reached the end of the open trail. It ended in a heavy growth of manzanita. Apparently there was no way through the tangle of interlacing branches; but Cassidy followed the horse tracks, which led right into what appeared to be solid brush. He noticed that some one had crawled through the manzanitas with a pruning saw and had cut away the larger branches. The scars were not fresh; they had dried to a grayish black. Just enough of the larger branches had been removed to make a blind trail. A horse could put his weight against the remaining twigs, push them aside and pass through. The small branches would spring back into place behind the horse and leave no sign of an open trail.

Cassidy tried to force his way through. But he lacked a lot of necessary weight, also about three legs, when it came to imitating a horse. He dropped to his hands and knees and found that he could crawl through and beneath the branches. From no point along the trail behind him had he been able to catch a glimpse of the town. He knew only that he was heading in the direction of Oro Mañana, but he had no idea at all of where the trail would come out.

The first thing that he saw from beneath the brush was the face of a rocky cliff. The manzanitas ended at the edge of a shallow ravine, a dry watercourse. The far side of this little ravine was the cliff. The sloping surface of a rock formed a natural ramp from the bottom of the ravine up to the manzanitas.

About eighty yards up the ravine Cassidy came within sight of the horse corral belonging to MacDonald, the mine foreman. A more or less distinct horse trail led out of the ravine and along the fence to a door in the rear wall of a small barn. In front of the door was an open space, room enough for a wagon, even with four horses attached, to turn around. The wheel tracks led up the very steep slope, past MacDonald's cottage toward the jail. The latter, however, was not in sight. A corner of MacDonald's cottage was all that was visible through the brush that continued part of the way up the slope.

Cassidy read the story of the wheel tracks. There was no natural pasturage around Oro Mañana. All horse feed had to be freighted in from Reynolds. A loaded wagon, with the wheels locked, could come down that slope. The biggest problem would be to keep it from coming down too fast. The feed would be unloaded into the barn, and the horses could easily haul the empty wagon back up the steep hill.

Cassidy opened the barn door. The blue roan stood in front of a feed rack, through the bars of which it had been endeavoring to fish forth a few wisps of baled hay that lay just beyond reach. Cassidy ran his hands over the animal's back. It was cool and smooth. And he could detect no gritty feeling of dried sweat on the neck or shoulders. He did, however, gain an impression to the effect that the horse had been rubbed recently with a coarse fiber brush. He saw the brush lying on a horizontal wall brace. He examined the brush; he even sniffed at it, but could come to no satisfactory conclusion. Perhaps MacDonald had brushed off the horse before going to work that morning. The saddle blanket that lay on a feed box was dry; it was stiff from old, dry sweat.

"Golly!" Cassidy muttered. "I sure need a drink. This tryin' to be a detective is plumb harrowin'. I'm gonna quit the job. I sure am!" he added, as if to convince himself. "Another day like this, and I'll begin to feel awful sorry for this sprig of the Cassidy family. I sure will."

He went out of the barn and hobbled slowly and painfully up the hill.

AS HE came into the open, beyond the last thicket of manzanitas, he saw the girl. He wondered why she had a Colt in her hand.

"Same hat, same coat," thought Cassidy. "It was her, all right, that I saw hiding the slicker and the gun. She found them pants—them mail order pants that was hid. I never saw them up the hill because of the brush."

He began to wonder why she was staring at him in such a peculiar way.

"Why are you pretending that you are forced to limp?" she inquired.

"Who? Me? I ain't pretendin'! I sure ain't. I got a toothache in my ankle every step I try to take on it."

"Did you get rid of your hat because you knew I saw you? That hat was rather conspicuous."

"Saw me? When?" Cassidy felt bewildered. "When I was watchin' you?"

"I saw you hiding the flour bag with the eyeholes in it and the slicker and the rusty gun."

"You saw *me* hiding 'em? Say, I saw *you* doin' jest that same thing. Gosh!" Cassidy scratched the back of his head. "Say," he blurted out, "one of us is plumb crazy! I'm beginnin' to suspect that I'm the one! I'll swear to gosh that I saw *you* hidin' them articles, and here you come right out and say that you saw *me* doin' it. Ma'am, I *pass!* I sure do. What else did you see me doin'?"

Cassidy's absolute bewilderment appeared to be so genuine that the girl was puzzled.

"I am positive that I saw you," she said. She waited.

"Well, I know danged well that I saw *you*," said Cassidy. "I saw you gettin' rid of that bandit's outfit. I'm tellin' you right now that right after I saw you I sent in my resignation by this here mental teleg-graphy. I don't know what your private reasons are or were for robbin' your aunt, and I don't want to know them. I wouldn't work ten seconds for a dollar a minute for your aunt. With due respect to her, like Griggs says, you understand. I ain't workin' as a detective any more. I'm goin' back to my ranch. I wish I was there right now."

"Go ahead and wish," she said coolly, "but you're not going until you have explained—if you can."

"Explain? Say, ma'am, I wish you'd explain why you shot my horse and tried to kill me. You didn't hafta do that. It's danged lucky for me that that carbine's so pitted and rusty that it won't shoot straight."

She stared at him for a moment, then laughed.

"You'd better tell your story of what happened this morning. Tell it to the judge, Cassidy. I'm the judge." She tried to look severe and dangerous as she waggled the muzzle of the big Colt up and down. She smiled, despite her efforts not to. "You look so honestly pathetic—and funny. Go ahead and talk. I'm busting

with my own words and my story, but I want to hear yours first."

Cassidy told everything that had happened to him that morning.

She nodded.

"I believed you all the time. I knew that you weren't the bandit, unless you just took up banditing as a profession this morning. Griggs heard the three shots. I met him on the road a few minutes after that. Griggs must have a good ear. He said that two shots were from a carbine and one from a Colt. That fits in with your story. Griggs said that it was the same bandit who had always held him up. Same mask, same slicker, same gun, same husky voice—according to Griggs."

"SAY, LEMME ask some questions?" Cassidy burst out. "You say Griggs heard the shots? Was the shipment stolen this morning. I suspect that it was, but nobody's told me about it—yet."

"It was."

"And what were you doing up in the hills, where you met Griggs?"

"Why, I was hurrying back from Reynolds."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but what were you doin' there?"

"Why, I made a fast trip over there to telegraph to the sheriff, like you told me to. I could go to Reynolds on the road in half the time it would take me to reach Pinkerton on that nightmare of a trail."

"Uh-huh! And you met the stage? And Griggs told you he'd been held up and that he'd heard shots afterwards? What did you do after that?"

"I hurried to the top of the Red Hat Rock. From there I could see a lot of territory. I could see almost down here to the town. The top of the rock is only two or three hundred yards from the point where Griggs said he was held up, although the road takes nearly two miles to reach the place where I met Griggs.

"From the top of the rock I saw you. That big pearl gray hat of yours is unmistakable. It's the only hat like it around here. It stuck up like a full moon. I saw you hiding those things. Then I saw you ride off through what looked like solid brush. The brush was so high that I never got even a single glimpse of the horse you were riding. All I could see was the hat."

"Yeh, you saw the hat. But lemme tell you that I wasn't under it. I told you that I must'a' lost that hat when my horse fell. I want that hat back; it cost me twenty-two dollars and four-bits. It's the best hat I ever owned. What did you do after you saw my hat riding along above the brush?"

"Why, naturally, I tried to get down to the place where I saw you hiding something. It—"

"Wait a minute," said Cassidy. "You mean to where you saw somebody under my hat doin' somethin'. Le's get this straight. That somebody wasn't me!" A grin. "I noticed that rock, what you call the Red Hat Rock. How long did it take you to get down the slope from there?"

"An awful long time. The brush was too thick. I rode this way and that, uphill, downhill and along the slope, until, after perhaps half an hour, during which my progress had been only a few hundred feet, I came to the trail. It only took two or three minutes then to ride down to the little opening."

"Well, you got there first. I saw you there. I danged near took a shot at you. No foolin', I sure come danged near doin' it. I thought you was the bandit. You ain't proved to me yet that you ain't."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous!"

"I ain't. I'm suspicious, tha's all. My horse got shot and my good hat got stole. My feelin's and my ankle got hurt somethin' awful. But that private trail, with the blind entrance to it at this end, makes it look kinda suspicious for this MacDonald *hombre*."

"That's ridiculous, too. Mac's duties keep him in the mine. Besides, he's a good friend of the sheriff's."

"Yeh, that's what Bill Collier, over at Pinkerton, told me. But bein' a friend of

the sheriff's ain't no recommend—much. Did you know that MacDonald thinks that he owns half the mine?"

"That's ridiculous, too."

"Say," Cassidy blurted out, "don't you know any other words? You keep ridin' that ridiculous word with sharp rowels. And in case you don't know it, Miss Ruth, I'm tellin' you that this MacDonald once staked your Uncle Mike. Yep, Mac thought, finally, that he'd chucked his cash away. He quit Mike cold. After Mike hit it rich he paid Mac back, but this Mac thought he was gettin' cheated. Mike gave Mac the nice easy job as mine foreman, but Mac still thinks he got the short end of the twig. They tell me that right now when Mac gets a few drinks of hard licker in him he tells the world that he was cheated."

"That's ridiculous, too. Mr. MacDonald does not drink!" This was an emphatic, positive gesture of finality.

"Uh!" Cassidy strangled a grin. "I'm glad to hear that. "You go tell that to your Aunt Mary; she'll be glad to hear it."

"Oh, but she knows it!"

"Thasso? I lost my hat, so I can't take it off to your Aunt Mary. She knows everything, doesn't she?"

"Now, don't be sarcastic as well as ridiculous," was the lofty retort.

"Uh! I sure pass, ma'am. You're too much for me. I'm goin' up and ask Aunt Mary what become of my twenty-two-fifty hat. That ought to be easy for her to answer."

Cassidy grinned, much pleased with this bit of heavy sarcasm. But his first step on his wrenched ankle wiped off the grin.

CHAPTER X

GRIGGS' INGOT

THE INTERVIEW with Miss Robertson was far from being satisfactory, especially from Cassidy's viewpoint. He told his story, with the result, as he put it later, "For all the good it done me". When he told about the concealed trail through the brush and his suspicions about MacDonald he was squelched. Miss Robertson, it seemed, had convictions as well as principles. She was convinced that MacDonald could have had nothing to do with the holdups. The big blow to her, she said, was the shattering of her faith in Cassidy's ability to guard the shipment. He, according to what he gathered from her flow of words, had been negligent, careless, slack, remiss, errant, unreliable and a few more things of similar nature. She used words that Cassidy did not understand, but he had no difficulty in gathering their meaning. She talked so much and so fluently that Cassidy's sense of humor finally arose to his rescue. She stopped for a deep breath.

"I take it, ma'am, that you don't think I done right by you," he interpolated, grinning foolishly.

"Indeed, I do not! I—"

"Wait a minute!"

"I won't wait! I think—"

"You will wait!" he interrupted. "So far, you've only been funny. I want to stop you before you begin to get insultin'. Savvy? I don't want you to go to saying things that'll make you sorry later. The trouble you've had with this bandit—"

"Hello, folks!" The loud hail came from just outside the office.

"Oh, that's Mr. Whiting." Miss Robertson hastened to open the door.

The sheriff was not his usual cool, immaculate self. He was dusty and sweaty. He mopped his face again with a blue bandanna as he entered the office.

"I got the telegram about Breck bein' dead," he announced.

"Breck's dead, all right," said Cassidy. "He's awful dead!"

"Where's MacDonald?" Whiting inquired.

"In the mine, of course," said Miss Robertson. "He told me of the tragedy, and then went to work."

She looked through the open door and saw her niece approaching. She frowned when she noticed the unconventional pants.

"Ruth, dear," she called out. "Please tell Mr. MacDonald to hasten to the office."

The girl started running down toward the mouth of the tunnel. Miss Robertson turned back to Whiting.

"Ruth rode to Reynolds to send the message to you, Mr. Whiting. On her return journey she, of course, met the stage. Mr. Griggs informed her that he had been held up a few minutes before he met her. He had lost the ingot."

"Yeah?" Whiting looked at Cassidy. "I thought you were s'posed to ride along behind and keep your eye on the stage."

"I tried to," said Cassidy. "I never caught up with it. I tried a short cut—" he hesitated.

"Yeah?" said Whiting. "What happened?"

"Plenty! I got dry gulched. My cayuse is layin' dead up on the road. I had one hell of time gettin' back here, with a sprained ankle."

Through the open door they saw MacDonald stumbling up the trail behind the girl. It was evident that she must have met MacDonald near the mouth of the tunnel; otherwise she could not have brought him with such promptness.

MACDONALD, in response to the sheriff's questions, gave his version of finding Breck's body lying in the cabin. Whiting, if nothing else, was methodical. He had been summoned because of Breck's death, therefore he would investigate that first. Miss Robertson, however, attempted to switch the investigation off to the stage robbery. MacDonald was surprised; it was the first he had heard of the holdup. He wanted to know more.

But Whiting was possessed of a single track mind. He "shushed" MacDonald and asked the latter to lead the way to Breck's cabin. MacDonald obliged, but persisted in trying to ask more questions about the holdup.

The two women accompanied the men as far as the outside of the cabin. Whiting thoughtfully sized up things and stated that, in his opinion, it was clearly a case of suicide.

"That's my opinion, too," said MacDonald, "but, listen, Whitey—about the holdup this morning—"

"Yeh, we'll take that up now. What about it?"

"Well, I hate to say it, but I saw this Cassidy, here, who's been hired as a detective—well, from the edge of the dump, where I happened to be standing—I saw—"

"Yeh," prompted Whiting, "what did you see?"

"I saw him take a short cut—to head off the stage."

"Thasso?" said Cassidy. "Mebbe you saw me try it, but you should have waited. You'd 'a' seen me back track. I lost a lot of time in tryin' that short cut. I had to go back to the road."

"Watch him, Whitey," said MacDonald. "Don't let him go for his gun."

"What's the idea?" Whiting inquired, warily watching Cassidy. Cassidy, in turn, noted that the sheriff's right hand had closed on the butt of his Colt. "What's the idea?" the sheriff continued.

"The idea, Whitey—" heavily—"the idea is that I'm going to call this Cassidy a liar! Watch him!"

"This ain't personal, is it?" the sheriff inquired.

"Not a bit! I'm the peace officer here, but this Cassidy's got a bad reputation. I've heard about him. He's s'posed to be a purty slick gunman. Right now, I'm giving my evidence to you, Whitey. So watch him; he'll probably try to shoot me."

"Huh?" Whiting grunted. "I'm watching; but I can't make head or tail of this. What's the scheme?"

"No scheme," said MacDonald. "Not much—unless you call his slickness in taking a short cut and sticking up the stage himself a scheme. He's a liar when he says he had to come back because he couldn't make the jump across the arroyo on the short cut. I can prove he's a liar. I'll take you right up there now and make the jump on my own horse. I'll show you

how he did it. Won't that prove he's a liar?"

"I dunno, Mac. You're my friend, and I'm willin' to take your word for a lot, but you don't know what I'm up against. Bill Collier says a lot of good things about this Cassidy. According to Bill, Cassidy is a cross between a ring tailed wonder and an angel. He's sure got Bill hypnotized."

"Aw, Bill Collier ain't so much."

"Now, listen, don't go to exposin' your ignorance that way. Bill Collier's forgot more'n you'll ever know. I'll take your word for a hell of a lot, Mac, but don't you go to fightin' Bill Collier. Lots of men ain't with us today because they figgered Bill the same way you seem to figger him. Don't do that, Mac."

"I can prove that Cassidy's a liar, by making that jump myself! MacDonald repeated. "If you take Cassidy's gun away, I'll tell you some more."

"I ain't got no license to take Cassidy's gun away."

"Well, you're the sheriff, ain't you? What more license do you need?"

"I don't need a license. I need some evidence."

"Well, you get his gun away—and I'll supply the evidence."

"How about it, Cassidy?" said the sheriff. "Mac's a friend of mine, you understand, but I ain't above suspectin' that he's talking through his hat."

"Well, he sure is, Sheriff. That ain't all. I got some evidence of my own. You just go ahead and take Mac's gun away first. Then I'll surrender mine."

The sheriff collected a Colt from MacDonald and then from Cassidy.

"I reckon Mac gets the first shot," he said. "Spring your evidence, Mac."

"Well, I told you half of it, Whitey. And you just as much as called me a liar. I'm holding back the real stuff as a clinch. Let this Cassidy detective speak his piece."

CASSIDY spoke. He told the simple facts as he knew them, but he omitted all mention of having seen the girl at all. He said that his suspicions had been aroused by the numerous horse droppings in the small slashing beside the mysterious trail, and that he had uncovered the flour sack mask, the black slicker and the rusty carbine. Cassidy's clincher was the pointing out that the blind trail led to MacDonald's corral.

"Any more?" MacDonald calmly inquired.

"Nope!" said Cassidy. "I don't need any more."

"You're crazy!" MacDonald declared. "I made that trail through the brush. It's my private trail. I use it to cut off a couple of miles when I go to Reynolds on private business. You're crazy when you suspect that I could have used that trail to ride up on and hold up the stage. Why, I'm the mine foreman! I've got to stay in the mine to watch the miners."

"Is thasso?" Cassidy inquired. "I wanta know one thing."

"What's that?" suspiciously.

"Who watches you when you're s'posed to watch the miners?"

"Nobody has to. I run the whole works. But I've kept my eyes open. You'll remember, Whitey, that I told you there was something wrong with Griggs."

"Yes, Mac, you did. I've had my suspicions about him all along. But what about it?"

"What about it? Why, ever since this Cassidy has come to town he and Griggs have been as thick as two thieves. And that ain't all. Breck heard them talking. They was talking about how to make a faked holdup look like a real robbery. Breck come and told me about it. We couldn't prove anything. But Breck was found dead. It looked to me like suicide. But right now I've got my suspicions. Maybe they sneaked in last night and shot Breck with his own gun. They made it look like suicide."

"But why should they kill Breck?" the sheriff inquired.

"To silence him. They maybe knew he had heard them talking. Ain't that motive enough?"

"Maybe it is, Mac, but I'm afraid, from the way things looked, you'll have a hard time proving it."

Cassidy had said nothing, for the simple reason that he could think of nothing to say. To put it mildly, he was completely flabbergasted."

"Give me back my gun, Whitey," said Mac. "I got a right to have a gun. You know I'm the peace officer here in town."

The sheriff returned MacDonald's Colt. He looked at Cassidy.

"You ain't got no grudge against Mac, have you?"

"The hell I ain't!" Cassidy snapped. "He's standin' there and lyin' like hell, a-tryin' to make me out a murderer and a thief."

"Well," said the sheriff soothingly, "you got to understand Mac's position. He's the marshal here, and he's only trying to do his duty as he sees it. He's entitled to have his suspicions. He hasn't proved them yet, however, to my satisfaction. You yourself are here in a sort of unofficial capacity. The chances are that you have a lot of suspicions of your own. Think it over; then maybe you'll understand how Mac feels about it. If you assure me that you have nothing personal against Mac, I'll give you back your gun."

"No, you don't! Not yet, anyway!" MacDonald objected. "Hang on to that gun for a few minutes. I just had an idea."

"What's the idea?"

"Did you ever search Griggs' house?"

"No," said Whiting. "Why should I?"

"That's just it. You overlooked doing that as being a good bet. I just got the idea right now myself for the first time."

"Sounds like a fool idea," said Whiting. "There's been too many passengers on the stage as witnesses to the effect that Griggs couldn't have had anything to do with the holdups. I've turned it over in my mind a whole lot, but I had to clear Griggs."

"But you missed a bet," MacDonald persisted. "You never searched his house. Let's do it now."

"Well, just to oblige you, and let you get your suspicions out of your system, we will," agreed Whiting.

The two women had been silent. Miss Robertson spoke:

"Your suspicions, Mac, to me seem preposterous. As Mr. Whiting so clearly puts it, how could Griggs possibly have had anything to do with the robberies?"

"He might give a signal to let the robber know there was gold on the stage," MacDonald answered. "In that case, he'd be getting his share of the loot right along. But Griggs ain't the jasper I'm trying to pin down right now."

"Let's go," said the sheriff. "Let's get this over. You can come along, Miss Robertson, you and Ruth."

THEY went, they searched, with Cassidy sitting in a chair and calmly smoking a cigaret while MacDonald and Whiting searched. It was evident that Whiting's efforts were half hearted and perfunctory; he was doing it only to satisfy his friend, MacDonald.

And it was MacDonald who discovered the small but very heavy ingot hidden in a partly emptied bag of flour. His left hand, white with flour, came out of the bag. The bar of gold was clenched in his fingers. He shook his hand to dislodge some of the clinging white powder. His right hand jerked his Colt from its holster. He pointed the gun toward Cassidy.

"Here's the evidence, Whitey," he announced, dropping the ingot with a resounding thump on the table. "Just as I thought."

Cassidy almost fell off the chair. For a moment he could scarcely believe his eyes. In a flash, however, he saw how the bar had come to be there. MacDonald had planted it. There could be no other explanation.

Miss Robertson broke away from her interested study of certain empty bottles she had discovered on the floor against one wall. She looked at the bar of gold as she walked slowly toward the table. She turned away finally to look at MacDonald for a few seconds. Her gaze went to the sheriff and finally centered on Cassidy. In her eyes was a peculiar, queer, "I-don't-believe-it-yet" expression.

Cassidy blinked and scratched the back of his head.

"Ma'am," he said, "I don't savvy this a-tall. Is there any way you can tell if this is the same bar you sent on the stage this mornin'?"

She picked up the ingot and brushed away most of the clinging flour.

"This is the bar that was shipped this morning," she announced. "But—I—can not understand—"

"There's somethin' awful fishy about it bein' found here," Cassidy continued. "It sure is awful fishy." His accusing gaze centered on MacDonald. "And there's only one answer."

"That's right, boss," said MacDonald. "There's only one answer. Griggs got together with Cassidy. They faked the holdup, and Cassidy brought the gold right here to the cabin and hid it in the flour. I'm taking Cassidy to jail—right now."

"Let me speak," the girl broke in excitedly. "Cassidy is right. There is something fishy, as he puts it, about the bar being found here in the cabin."

"Do you think so, Miss Ruth?"

The sheriff plainly was on the fence. He did not know which way to jump. MacDonald was his friend. But to argue with the girl was something else again.

"Go ahead. I'm sure willing to listen to you."

"I met Griggs, after the holdup," she explained. "He was continuing with the stage on his way to Reynolds. It is obviously impossible that he could have returned here with the bar. And I met Mr. Cassidy on his return to town. He was badly crippled. There were other circumstances, too, that to me make it seem ridiculous that Cassidy could have had anything to do with the bar being hidden here. I accused him, at first. I really suspected him. But he in turn really suspected me. He never even mentioned seeing me in the brush up on the mountain when he told his story. He was trying to protect me. That shows he's innocent."

"Haw-haw!" MacDonald laughed hoarsely. "He's plumb slick. He knows how to get around on the soft side of a woman, all right."

"Mac! You shut up! You're not a gentleman!" Ruth flushed as she snapped out the words.

Cassidy, despite his worries, was forced to grin at the fiery glare that was centered on the mine foreman. The sheriff kept a blank face, but it took an effort to do so.

"Yeh, Mac," he said, "you better shut up. "A few more words like them and you'll have Miss Ruth mad at you."

"I'm mad at him right now!" the girl retorted.

"Ruth, dear," Miss Robertson sweetly suggested, "hadn't you better return home with me and let the men settle this problem?" She took her niece by the arm. "And may I suggest that you make a change from the unconventional costume in which you are clad."

The girl tried to squirm away from the grasp on her arm. But the grasp was like Miss Robertson's principles; it was firm and fixed. And Miss Robertson had the advantage of thirty or forty pounds in weight. She tried to be ladylike in leading the girl away. She tried to make it appear that it was the power of suggestion that led the struggling girl out of the cabin. But it was her superior weight that did the trick.

The two officers settled the problem for the time being by locking Cassidy in the jail. MacDonald pocketed the key and returned to his duties at the mine.

CHAPTER XI

A PROPOSAL AND A RELEASE

ABOUT an hour later Cassidy heard an argument outside. He recognized the voices. The argument was one sided, for Ruth Robertson was doing most of the talking. The walking argument passed along the trail just outside the jail and went down the steep hillside toward MacDonald's little cottage. Cassidy went to the barred win-

dow, grasped two bars with his hands and stood on tiptoe with his one good leg to take a look. Ruth Robertson had the sheriff by the arm and was leading him. The sheriff was not quite willing, but superior weight had its way. Only, this time, it was purely the weight of argument. The girl was talking the sheriff's feet into every step they took. Cassidy's face lifted into what threatened to become a permanent grin. Despite his predicament, he felt gay. She was defending him to the skies and points above. As an ally she was a whole army, especially when alone with the infatuated sheriff.

She talked the sheriff into making a thorough search of MacDonald's cottage. The search was futile. They went down to the corral and spent a few minutes in the barn. They came out again. The sheriff was protesting, oh, very gingerly, politely and diplomatically. The protest was only half hearted, for after reaching a certain point he would pull in his horns. The certain point would be reached when the girl started speaking again and gave him no chance to say more. She was excited, to say the least. Her voice arose until Cassidy could hear what she said:

"I don't care if MacDonald is your friend! I think he's a sneak! And if Breck was murdered, it was MacDonald who killed him!"

The sheriff's reply was inaudible. They came back again up the path toward the jail. Cassidy again was able to overhear the girl's words:

"I almost laughed when Cassidy said to Mac, 'Yes, but who watches *you*, when you're supposed to be watching the miners?' "

The sheriff's reply was low, suave, and still inaudible.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" she retorted loudly. "You can bet that I'm fighting for Cassidy. You didn't see what I saw, and you don't know what I know. It's ridiculous, to think, or for you to keep on thinking the thoughts that MacDonald put in your head. I know that Cassidy could not have placed the gold in the flour bag."

"Well, we sneaked in and searched Mac's house. I didn't like to do it, but I did it to please you. What do you want me to do next?"

"I want you to get Cassidy out of that jail. I am sure that he is innocent. I think that it is an outrage to lock him in that little kennel."

"Well, uh, it's all right with me to turn him loose. You go put it up to Mac; he's got the key. If Mac will turn him loose, it's sure all right with me."

"I can't talk to Mac. He's crazy! He insists that Cassidy is guilty. He won't listen to me. He is determined—and mean. I want you to talk to him."

"My gosh! Ain't I talked to him? Didn't you hear me?"

"You were too nice and polite. If you like me the way you say you do, you'll just go and take the key away from him."

"Gosh! I don't know what to do," said the harassed sheriff. "If I get real salty with Mac I'll lose his friendship."

"Doesn't it mean more to you to have mine?"

"Gosh, yes! But friendship ain't all I want. Today was the first chance I had to talk to you alone, and you don't seem to take my proposal seriously."

"But I do!" she protested.

"Then why didn't you promise to marry me? If you do that, I'll just up and turn Cassidy loose on your say-so."

"I don't think that is very fair."

"Well, I don't think that your leaving my proposal up in the air that way is very fair either."

"Why not? It's a serious thing to me. I—I wanted time to think it over."

"Uh!"

The sheriff scowled as he glanced up at the small barred window and saw Cassidy's forehead and eyes above the sill. Whiting had deliberately stopped within twenty feet of the jail because at that point the solid little structure was between him and the mine office. Perhaps he feared Miss Robertson's eagle eye.

"Le's move on," he suggested, scowling again at Cassidy.

"Let's not. Auntie can not see us here, which makes it a good place to thrash things out."

"But Cassidy can hear us." This in a harsh whisper.

She looked over her shoulder. She saw the upper half of Cassidy's face. She smiled, then turned back to Whiting.

"I don't care if he did or does overhear. I haven't said anything that I'm ashamed of. Have you?" she said sweetly.

"Uh! I— Gosh!" Whiting broke into a sweat. "I ain't in the habit of proposin' right out in public," he protested.

"How are you in the habit of doing it? I didn't know it was a habit." She laughed.

"Aw—I ought to have known it. You're only making fun of me."

"No, I'm not. I'm only testing you out. Now, I want you to understand that I'm not promising to marry you. Not in the least. But if you will go to Mac and make him release Cassidy, I'll go over and talk to the minister about getting married."

"Why talk to the minister about it?"

"Well, I can't talk to auntie about it, not very well. You see, she prides herself that you visit Oro Mañana regularly to see her."

"Uh!"

This, evidently, was news to Whiting, and not very good news.

"Well, uh—" he said, "maybe you're right. If you've gotta talk it over with somebody, maybe it's better be the minister, at that."

THE SHERIFF and the girl came up the steep hill and passed beyond Cassidy's limited range of vision. For several seconds Cassidy continued to stand on tiptoe. He became tired and dropped back to his heel. Immediately, however, he raised himself again. Something out in the manzanita thicket had caught his eye. It was a brightly colored something, but he could see only about two square inches of it. A bit of red and yellow. It puzzled him, and he sat down in one corner to try to do some thinking.

Twenty minutes of this brought no result beyond the full realization of the fact that he was in a fourth class jail and that there was a first class smell in the woodpile, somewhere. Then he jerked around to face the door. Some one had inserted a key in the lock. The door opened. Ruth Robertson stood in the doorway. She threw a half scared glance over her shoulder. No one was in sight up the hill.

Cassidy, surprised, limped to the doorway.

"I betcha they don't know you're here," he said, grinning at her obvious fear.

"Don't talk!" she ordered. "Get out of here!"

"How'd you get that key away from Mac?" he inquired.

"Don't stand there like a silly fool!" she snapped. "Get around to the downhill side of the jail, where you can't be seen by any one."

Cassidy got. She slammed the jail door and locked it. She followed him, and heaved a deep breath of relief as she scuttled around the corner without having been seen by any one in the town above.

"Gosh!" said Cassidy. "I sure hope you got my gun while you was at it. It ain't no use, my bein' out of jail, unless I got my gun to help keep me out."

"You expect everything, don't you?" she retorted.

"Nope. But if you'd stole me my gun instead of that key I'd sure appreciate everything more. Say, how'd you manage to steal that key?"

"I didn't. This is the duplicate key. I got it out of the office safe. It has been there for years." She held it up. It was tied to a cardboard tag on which was scrawled the word 'Jail.'"

"So far, so good," said Cassidy, "but what do we do next?"

"We? I thought I did a whole lot in getting you out of jail. You're a man, and I thought you'd know what to do after that."

"Not without a gun, I don't," Cassidy answered. "This toothache ankle makes it worse. Every time I take a step my brains sort of rush down into my boot to help this ankle hurt worse. I can't walk and think at the same time."

Cassidy's gaze centered on the blue roan in the corral below. He licked his lips. He had a thought, and gazed off into the manzanitas to where he had seen the small splash of colors. He could see nothing except the interlacing limbs and leaves.

"I seen somethin' that looked queer," he announced. "I seen it from up there at the window. I can't see it now, but I'm goin' down to find out what it was." He started a painful, hobbling gait down the hill, looking back to assure himself that the jail and then the brow of the hill screened him from the view of the town.

She slowly followed.

"What did you see?" she inquired.

"How'n — 'Scuse me! What I meant to say was how do I know—yet. I'm sure gonna find out."

AT THE far side of the clearing opposite Mac's barn Cassidy examined the ground at the edge of the brush. He found, evidently, what he expected to find, for he grunted with satisfaction, dropped to his hands and knees and crawled beneath some interlacing manzanita limbs. A few feet of this, and he could stand erect and hobble onward. About ten yards from the edge of the open space he found a Navaho blanket, hanging on a limb. The blanket was still damp with horse sweat. Cassidy sniffed at it, as if testing some rare perfume. He felt the blanket and squeezed it, then sniffed again. He turned, to find the girl standing right behind him. She, unable to restrain her curiosity, had followed.

"Well, Doctor Cassidy, what's the verdict?" she inquired.

"It ain't rained this morning," said Cassidy, grinning, "and there's been enough sunshine to have dried off last night's dew, so I'm guessin' that this blanket has been used as a saddle pad recent. Yep, plumb recent. She sure smells like it and feels like it."

"It's one of Mac's saddle blankets," said Ruth.

Her brow wrinkled. Her gaze met Cassidy's. They grinned.

"Well?" They uttered the word simultaneously, and grinned again.

"I'm sayin' that this looks suspicious," said Cassidy. "Danged suspicious, you betcha! Name one good reason for this blanket bein' hid out here thisaway."

"I can," said Ruth.

"You can? So can I. But we can't prove it. I reckon we better leave this blanket right here." Cassidy dropped to his knees and looked carefully around beneath the lower branches of the manzanitas. The girl hopefully dropped down and helped him look.

"No use," said Cassidy. "A man could hardly crawl at all under them limbs. And lookit them leaves on the ground. They all look alike. They ain't never been disturbed. They been gatherin' there and rottin' away for years."

"What were you looking for?" she inquired.

"Somethin' to match the blanket," Cassidy answered. "It sure looks suspicious, Mac's hidin' a damp horse blanket away careful like this way. He didn't want it to be found, and he didn't think it would be found. If he thinks this is such a danged good hidin' place, he might 'a' hid somethin' else here, too. But it looks like he ain't. You can't put them manzanita leaves back in place the same way they've been packed down by snow once. Nope, you sure can't. Mac ain't hid nawthin' in here but the blanket."

"Oh, I think this is all so thrilling!" she exclaimed.

"What's so thrilling?"

"Watching a detective work—and to have him tell me his deductions."

"Huh? I dunno's I ever had any of them. I ain't no detective, nohow. Right now I'm just an escaped prisoner."

"Yes, and fighting to prove your innocence. I think it's thrilling."

"How'm I gonna do any fighting unless I get a gun? Answer me that."

SHE WAS forced to smile at Cassidy's serious, harassed air. Again she wrinkled her brow. "If you won't be happy unless you have a gun, I suppose I'll have to be Santa Claus and get you one. Now, that private trail of Mac's makes me suspect that he is the bandit. This damp blanket, used this morning, and so carefully hidden out to dry, is enough to prove it to me, at least."

"Me, too," said Cassidy.

"But auntie or the sheriff won't believe us," she went on.

"Maybe Mac will," Cassidy suggested, grinning.

"Oh, don't be silly! I'm thinking. Mac could slip down the ravine from the mine to his corral. No one could see him. Unseen, he could saddle up, ride farther down the ravine and then take that steep short cut up his private trail to the road. He could rob the stage and be back at the mine without being gone for over half an hour. Perhaps even less than that. No one could see him coming or going."

"Yeh, I figgered out somethin' like that for myself. What kinda stumps me is how he could account for his bein' gone—somewhere—for even half an hour."

"He's the foreman. Auntie would be the only one who might miss him, but she never goes into the mine."

"Listen, Miss Ruth, how about the dead man, Breck? He was assistant foreman. He—"

"Let me talk. I can talk faster. Mac's trying to make out that Breck might have been murdered because he had heard you and Griggs talking sounded very far fetched to me. I thought that Mac was a little over anxious to stretch things a little too far. You told me that Mac had once staked Uncle Mike. I have thought about that. I noticed that MacDonald slid right over your story about your horse being shot. He stopped the sheriff from going up to take a look. But right now, Mr. Whiting is investigating. I made him go."

"Tha's fine. It sure is. But why did you steal the key?"

"I didn't steal it!" she interrupted. "I only borrowed it. I knew that you simply could not have hidden the ingot in Griggs' cabin. It would take hours for any one to get through that thick brush, except by the trail I discovered this morning."

"Yeh, but why was you squattin' down by Mac's corral, sort of waitin' for me—with a gun—when I finally come limpin' in?"

"Because I stopped my horse on the trail. I heard some one crashing through the brush, far up the hill behind me. I waited at the corral to see who was following. You finally showed up. I wasn't at all sure about your absolute innocence until Mac discovered the ingot in Griggs' flour bag. That, to me, proved your innocence. It likewise proved, as you put it, that there was something fishy somewhere."

"And to help prove it, to prove my story, you sent the sheriff up the road? Why didn't you go with him?"

"Because if I did I would not have been able to get you out of the jail. Auntie thinks I'm with the sheriff; the sheriff thinks I'm with auntie."

Cassidy grinned.

"You still ain't explained why you got me out of that jail."

"I got you out because I know that you're innocent. I'm depending on you to help me solve the mystery, to help me prove that Mac is the bandit. I had to get you out of jail because I know exactly what the sheriff will do."

"Yeh, what'll he do?"

"He'll come back, satisfied that your story checks up, and he'll go to Mac for the jail key. He'll tell everything to Mac. Well, you know how Mac can talk. He'll convince the sheriff all over again that you and Griggs are guilty. Mac sort of mesmerizes Whiting with words. He would talk Whiting into taking you over to the county jail instead of releasing you."

"Yeh, he probably would, if you weren't there to out talk him."

"Is that supposed to be a compliment to me, or what?"

"How do I know?" said Cassidy. "Now, it kinda strikes me that's there's a chance we're barkin' up the wrong tree. All the evidence that we got—if you can call it evidence—all of it points to Mac so smooth and easy that I'm beginnin' to suspect that we may be wrong. Yep, when all the straws point one way there's a chance that somebody has monkeyed with the straw heap. Now—"

"Don't forget," she interrupted. "Don't forget that to everybody except us the straws all point to you."

"THASSO, too, ain't it?" Cassidy scratched his head with such an air of comical bewilderment that she laughed.

"I can see that you were trying to be liberal minded," she said.

"Nope! I was gettin' suspicious, tha's all."

"Well, you just keep on being suspicious about Mac. I don't like him, anyway."

"That suits me fine," said Cassidy. "I'm plumb willin'. Now, if you get me that gun you mentioned—"

"I'll get your own gun," she promised. "The last I saw of it was when Mac was carrying it and your cartridge belt up toward his office at the mine. I'll get them when Mac is in the mine."

"I'll sure feel better after I get 'em. Why, I'll betcha that even this toothache ankle will feel better. Then I'll get me a hat out of Mac's cabin, or maybe out of Griggs' shack, and after you bring me a little grub I'll be all set to go."

"On Mac's horse?" she inquired.

Cassidy nearly blushed. Anyhow, the roots of his three day beard tingled unpleasantly.

"Why'd you ask that?" he demanded.

"Oh, I saw the look in your eyes a while ago. I don't want you to go away. I want you to stay here and help me search."

"Search? For what?"

"Why, for the gold that has been stolen. I'm convinced that every bar of it is hidden somewhere around here." She moved her hand in a semicircle that included all the land on the slope below the jail. "The bar that was stolen this morning came right back into town with suspicious speed—and was found in Griggs' cabin. I am sure that all the gold that was stolen before is still right here, hidden. I watched the way you scrutinized the manzanita leaves on the ground and then announced that nothing else but the blanket had been hidden in here."

"Shucks! That was dead easy, ma'am."

"I'm glad it was. It gives me confidence in you. It'll be easy for you to look around and eliminate many other possible hiding places. I just know, somehow, that all of the stolen gold is somewhere near Mac's cabin. Remember that the only way you can prove your own innocence to auntie and the sheriff is to find the gold and prove that Mac is guilty."

"Well, I'll sure do a lot of eliminatin'. That'll be plumb easy, the findin' of places where the gold ain't."

"I'm sure that you will find it," she went on. "It's almost a certainty that Mac did not carry any of the bars up to the mine to hide them."

"Tha's right, ma'am. He'd sure plant 'em where he could get to 'em with his horse in case he wanted to get out of here, sometime, in a hurry."

"I want you to work real hard to discover where the bars have been hidden," she continued. "You don't know how much it will mean to us—to auntie and me—to get that gold back. We owe a great deal of money to the bank, but I suppose she told you that. Now, this is a good hiding place for you. Stay right here until I can return with your Colt and gun belt."

She started away. Cassidy followed for a few yards. He squatted down to see what direction she took after she had crawled into the open. She went downhill, past the corral. She was heading for

the ravine that would bring her out far uphill, near the mouth of the mine and Mac's office.

CHAPTER XII

THE INFLUENCE OF LIQUOR

CASSIDY buckled on his gun belt and then examined his Colt with loving care. He finally shoved it back into the holster.

"Gosh, Miss Ruth, I sure feel a heap better now. Even my ankle feels better. No foolin', it does." He put his full weight on it, and winced.

"Well, I'm goin' right down into Mac's cabin and look for a hat," he continued. "I wisht I had my own hat back. That hat cost me twenty-two dollars and four bits."

"I saw an old hat in Mac's cottage," she said. "I'll go down there with you."

"You better not," Cassidy objected. "You see—uh—they might miss you—And when I'm down there I'm gonna bandage my ankle up tight. And besides, you can be a bigger help to me, in case I need help again, if your aunt and Mac and the sheriff don't suspect that you're throwin' in with the enemy, so to speak. Tell you what you better do," he went on hastily. "You better put that key back in the safe. Savvy? Then when they find out that I've got out of jail they won't go to suspectin' that maybe you had a hand in lettin' me out. Savvy? I think you'd better trot right back up the hill now. That'll sure be the best thing you can do."

"I don't think that you want me with you," she said.

"Well, uh, I wouldn't put it that way. I was jest sayin' what I think would be the best thing all around. Savvy?"

"Perhaps you are right," she agreed. "I'll go back. But you will work hard, won't you, Mr. Cassidy, to prove your own innocence—and everything."

"You betcha!" Cassidy promised, and she departed.

Cassidy heaved a sigh of relief as he watched her crawl through the brush and disappear. She was a nice girl, and a brainy one, but she was almost too nice. She would be a handicap for a man to have along when he entered Mac's cabin.

He found the old hat he had hoped to find. It was a tight fit, but would do. Then he set about the serious business of verifying his suspicion. He verified it easily. From a dark corner of the cupboard he pulled forth a quart bottle. It was nearly full. The contents had come from the barrel behind Frank's bar. Cassidy proved this by taking a drink. He took another drink. Then he grinned.

"She helped the sheriff search this place, did she?" he said aloud, holding out the bottle, the better to gage the height of the contents. "Well, I betcha it was the sheriff who searched the cupboard. And he didn't let her see this."

After another drink Cassidy proceeded to cut a long strip from a side of buckskin. He stretched this strip and then bound it tightly around his ankle. Taking the bottle with him, he set forth, after cautiously looking up the hill to be sure that the coast was clear. He hid the bottle down in the ravine before starting up the private trail that was Mac's short cut to the road above.

The drinks he had taken from Mac's bottle helped to make him painstakingly thorough in his examination of the trail. It seemed very logical that Mac, if he were the bandit, would hide the loot where he could easily pick it up if he were forced to leave town in a hurry. Where was a more logical place than along the private trail?

Cassidy's task was comparatively easy when it came to eliminating possible hiding places. The ground beneath the manzanita thicket on both sides of the trail was absolutely bare of vegetation. The dense shade and the thin blanket of dead manzanita leaves had killed everything that had tried to grow, except the manzanita trees themselves. At only a few points the interlacing limbs thinned out enough to allow a man to crawl beneath them. He stopped at each of these

places for a careful look, but the leaves and the ground beneath had never been disturbed.

HE REACHED the little opening where beneath the dried branches were concealed the long black slicker, the flour bag with the eye holes cut in it, and the rusty .44-40 carbine. He was searching around carefully when he heard the rattle of the stage as the wheels bounced in and out of the chuck-holes on the road up the hill. He could see the rising cloud of dust that marked the vehicle's course. He yelled once, but Griggs apparently did not hear. And then Cassidy remembered his own status as an escaped prisoner. He wished that he had thought of going up to the road to warn Griggs of what awaited him in Oro Mañana. Then he laughed to himself.

"Shucks!" he soliloquized. "It wouldn't 'a' done me no good to warn him, anyway. He'd prob'ly 'a' said, 'To hell with 'em; I'm innocent! They can't put me in jail!' "

"Yep!" Cassidy continued to himself. "And he prob'ly 'a' said, 'I can't delay the U. S. mail. Giddap!' Yeh, tha's just about what he'd 'a' said. He's plumb bull headed. He takes his stage drivin' plumb serious. At that, he might 'a' had some of that indigestion remedy on his hip."

Cassidy sighed regretfully as he thought of the bottle he had concealed down in the ravine.

"Oh, well, maybe it's better to be an escaped prisoner than just a prisoner." Cassidy dropped his right hand to the butt of his Colt and glared around, just for practise. His gaze dropped to the slicker, the mask and the carbine.

He picked up the rusty carbine. His favorite saddle gun was of this type and caliber. One of the reasons why Cassidy favored a .44 Colt was because, as he put it, "the shells is good for somethin'." The cartridges for the revolver would do their stuff in a .44-40 rifle or carbine. "What good is these .45 shells if you ain't got a .45?" was Cassidy's argument in favor of the .44.

The rusty exterior of the carbine failed to bother his thoughts. A little oil and a lot of rubbing would fix that. He opened the breech and stuck a corner of the white flour bag in front of the block. Then he squinted into the muzzle. The burned grease from the bullets and the black powder fouling clung heavily in the barrel, but Cassidy's professional eye looked beneath these. He looked hopefully. A carbine cost almost half a month's pay for a cowboy. He heaved a sigh of utter disgust. This carbine was not valuable. It would fire a cartridge, yes, but where would the bullet go? .44-40's had more or less fixed limitations in range—unless you had luck—but this carbine had lost its guarantee.

"Shucks! It's nawthin' but a rusty shame!" said Cassidy. "I betcha I can do better shootin' at one hundred yards with my Colt." In anger at the man who had treated a gun so badly Cassidy flung the carbine against the brush. It struck two twigs and bounced back into the opening.

Cassidy felt the urge to return to Oro Mañana. He had possessed high hopes of discovering something in his careful examination of both sides of the trail, but he had drawn a complete blank. The impelling thought now was of Griggs. Griggs would be clapped into jail by Mac. Cassidy had developed a certain fondness for Griggs. Griggs was a queer character, but he had his good points along with his bad ones. The worst thing that Cassidy held against him was the unlovely and very loud snore. Cassidy was generous enough to allow that Griggs could not help that. Cassidy had thought himself out, and he now wanted Griggs to take up the thinking where he himself had stopped. He wanted Griggs to analyze the developments of the morning, the chief and queerest developments being the discovery of the ingot in the sack of flour in Griggs' cabin.

Ready to leave the opening and go down the trail, Cassidy looked around.

The carbine again caught his gaze. He looked slowly in turn at the slicker and the white mask. These were pieces of evidence. A detective was supposed to gather evidence. So Cassidy gathered the carbine and the flour bag, which he wrapped in the black slicker. He tucked the bundle under one arm and limped down the trail.

WHEN he arrived down in the ravine below Mac's cottage Cassidy hastened to find the bottle he had hidden. He tilted it and gurgled freely. It was bad whisky, but it made him feel better. A second drink seemed to take the pain out of his ankle, so he took a third drink to improve the job.

Then he started up toward the corral. If no one was in sight he would continue on up the hill to find out whether or not Griggs was in jail. The downhill side of Mac's cottage was blind; there were no windows on that side. Cassidy kept the house between himself and the town above the jail. As he approached the cabin he was aware that some one was inside. But he kept limping onward, figuring that it was now too late to go back, and that he would be safest when right under the blind side of the building. Perhaps he could even crawl beneath the cabin. He would be securely hidden there.

But he saw that there was no chance of hiding beneath the cabin. The floor beams on the downhill side stood perhaps seven feet above the ground, but the space had been boarded in. Cassidy remembered, now, that the other sides of the foundations were likewise covered. He drew near enough to distinguish the words of those within the cottage. He recognized the sheriff's voice:

"That bottle was right there in the corner of the cupboard, I'm tellin' you. I kept Miss Ruth from seein' it."

"It's danged funny, it's not bein' there now," said Mac. "You had no business searchin' my place, anyway. I don't like it."

"But it was to clear you, Mac," the sheriff explained. "She suspected you. I didn't think that was right, so I let her take a look, to satisfy her. You know how Miss Ruth is. She gets her own way."

"Not with me, she don't!" Mac retorted. "And I'm tellin' you that there was no other way that Cassidy could 'a' got out of jail. She must have let him out. That's flat!"

"Yeh, that's what you suspected. You went ragin' up to the office about it. Miss Robertson opened the safe for you—and what did you find? You found the extra key right there in the safe, right there where it had been kept for years. I think you made a foolish move, Mac, honest I do. You made the boss awful mad when you come right out and said that Miss Ruth had let Cassidy out of jail. You couldn't prove it."

"Well, maybe I couldn't prove it," said Mac, "but I still suspect her. I took that extra key along with me, just to stop any more funny business. I was just makin' sure that Griggs'll stay put until you take him over to the county jail."

"Well," slowly, "I dunno about that, Mac. You jugged Griggs on your own responsibility. It don't seem right to me, somehow."

"Didn't we find the gold bar in Griggs' shack?" Mac demanded. "I'm tellin' you it was put there by Cassidy. If we had Cassidy in the jug now with Griggs we'd have the whole gang. I'm tellin' you that Griggs has been robbin' himself, or pretendin' that he's been robbed."

"Yeh, he's sure a slick worker," the sheriff drawled. "Most of the time there's passengers on the stage. I been workin' on this case, off and on. I've spent a lot of time travelin' around just to ask questions of the passengers who was with Griggs when he got robbed. Griggs don't put up no fight; that's all the passengers can say against him."

"Ain't that enough? Mac yelped. "I'm tellin' you that when he's alone he just steals the gold and pretends that he's been robbed. When there's passengers he has a confederate to stage a faked

holdup. That's why Griggs never fights. This time it was Cassidy. Maybe, all the time, it was Cassidy. And Cassidy has been slick enough never to show up here in town before."

"Yeh?" Cassidy thought that he detected a hint of amusement in the sheriff's drawl. "Well, Cassidy told a pretty straight story. I just come back from checkin' up on it. His hoss was shot, all right, just like he said. And I'm takin' Miss Ruth's word on the rest of Cassidy's story."

"That girl? You'd believe her? Why, Whitey, she ain't exactly right! She's a little crazy."

"Somebody's crazy, all right," the sheriff agreed. "I'm gettin' so's I ain't so doggone sure that it ain't myself. Now, let's back up to the original discussion. There wasn't any argument there; we both agreed that your bottle was gone. Me? My theory is that Cassidy stole it. I want a drink. I need a drink. Fetch out that flask you took away from Griggs. We can fill it up again. With me, a prisoner's possessions are sacred, usually, but in this case we'll just make a temporary borrow."

"That's fair enough," said Mac.

Evidently he produced the flask, for the next thing Cassidy overheard was an exclamation of disgust from the sheriff:

"Hell! Is that all that's in it? It ain't worth borrowin'. There ain't one good drink apiece for us."

"That's the trouble with these flasks," said Mac, "they don't hold nothin' to start with. I'm strong for them full quart size bottles. Here, Whitey, you drink first."

CASSIDY grinned cheerfully to himself. While the sheriff and the marshal were killing what was left of Griggs' indigestion remedy Cassidy reached into the front of his shirt for Mac's quart bottle. It was still about half full. He proceeded to lower the contents by nearly a full inch. He shuddered, and by a great effort managed to keep from coughing. He shook himself and again tested his game ankle. He could feel scarcely any pain at all as he put his weight on it.

And in the meantime, within the cottage, the two officers had finished Griggs' flask with a pair of frugal gulps.

"It's about time," said Mac, "that I got back to the mine. I got to see that we break out enough ore to run the stamps tomorrow. The boss has cut down the payroll so thin that it takes three days work to get out enough rock to run the mill for half a day. And will she listen to me about how to make money out of the mine? Naw!" Mac spat in disgust. His tone seemed to convey a personal grievance. "Hell, Whitey, first thing I know I'll be losin my job; there won't be no more job. Unless the bank keeps me on after it takes over the mine," he added.

"The thought of that makes me want another drink," said the sheriff. "Tell you what, Mac, you go back on the job and, bimeby, I'll stop in at Frank's and get a bottle and I'll bring it up to your office."

"That's a good idea," said Mac. "Let's go!"

They went. Cassidy sat down with his back against the building. He listened. Then he tilted the bottle to his lips. Again he listened. The two men were going up the hill. So, to celebrate their departure, he took another drink.

"Poor old Griggs," he soliloquized. "He's in jail, and maybe his indigestion is hurtin' him somethin' terrible. I betcha it is, since they took his bottle away. The danged robbers!"

Cassidy smiled as again he gaged accurately the remaining contents in the bottle he had stolen from Mac.

"I'll be big hearted and hand this bottle to Griggs up through the window bars. Maybe it'll help him get an idea to help me out in this detectin' job. I kinda wish to hell right now that I'd never took the danged job! I sure do wish I'd never took it. But I'm gonna stick at it. I've just gotta stick at it—sorta in self defense. You betcha!"

Cassidy arose and peered cautiously

around one corner. Mac and the sheriff were just disappearing over the brow of the hill. He waited a moment and then went up to the jail. He stopped beneath the window.

"Hey, Griggs!" he called in a low tone.

There was a stir within the jail. Two hands grasped the bars.

"Hello, Cassidy," said Griggs. "I hear that you're a stage robber."

"The same to you!" said Cassidy, laughing. "How'd you like a drink?"

"Why waste words? Hand it up. They took my flask away from me, dang 'em!" One of Mr. Griggs' hands came out between the iron bars and waggled hopefully. "C'mon with it!" he said impatiently. "I know you got a bottle. You would have."

Cassidy held the bottle at arm's length toward the eager fingers. But the bottle and the fingers missed connections by at least fourteen or fifteen inches. The three logs on which the jail floor had been nailed were at least two feet in diameter. Below the window, the hill fell away sharply. The soil had eroded from the drip from the eaves. The eaves projected a bare two inches from the wall. The highest foothold that Cassidy could gain left his feet nearly ten feet below the window.

He explained to Griggs. The latter shinned himself up to the bars and shoved one arm through. Cassidy stood on tiptoe. But there still remained a tantalizing inch or two between the bottle and the fingers.

"Aw, you gotta let down a rope," said Cassidy. "Your necktie, or somethin'."

"G'wan, you know I never wear no necktie."

"Thasso, too, ain't it?" Cassidy scratched his head.

"There's a moral hid somewhere in your not wearin' a necktie," Cassidy continued. "I ain't right sure what it is, but it's there." He pulled the cork and took a big swig.

Mr. Griggs heard the gurgle. It aggravated his thirst—or his indigestion. Mr. Griggs used words. They were indignant and impatient words. They were also highly tinged with profanity.

So Cassidy took still another drink. He felt for Griggs, but could not reach him. He understood just how Mr. Griggs felt about it. If Cassidy had stood there and thought it over for a little while it might have occurred to him that he could tie the bottle to a stick or a manzanita limb and thus be able to hoist it within reach of Griggs' fingers. But the blue roan down below in the corral had caught Cassidy's gaze.

"Hey, wait a minute, Griggs," he called out. "I'll jest go down and saddle up Mac's horse; then I can ride up here and hand you the bottle—dead easy."

"Well, hurry up!" Griggs snapped out.

"Sure! Hold your horses while I ketch up Mac's."

Cassidy went down the hill.

HE ENTERED the barn, closed the outer door again behind him and walked across to the door that stood open to the corral. It was a big corral and to the horse he was a stranger. Cassidy had swallowed enough whisky to make him feel brave and bold, but not enough so to risk going out into that big corral to rope the horse, thereby running a big chance of being seen from the town above. Mac's saddle hung from a peg, and on the saddle was a rope.

The barn was divided by a row of strong upright pickets. In the other half of the barn, protected by the fence, lay several bales of hay. Cassidy eyed the rope. Then he looked at the hay. The hay won. He opened the gate, entered the storage space and fluffed some of the compressed hay into a nice, enticing armful, which he carried to the door to the corral.

The lure proved to be sufficient. The corral was just a dust patch. The horse was hungry. To be sure, Cassidy was a stranger, but to the horse hay was hay. Its appetite was far greater than its caution. And when the horse came to the door it was roped and pulled into the barn. Cassidy saddled up. He opened

the outer door and prepared to ride up to the jail.

But first he had to recover the bottle, which he had carefully placed beyond reach of possible harm. He held the bridle reins while he gaged the height of the diminished contents. Then he took a good-sized drink therefrom. He shook himself, swung up into the saddle and rode out of the barn. The horse turned downhill toward the ravine and stopped at the place where Cassidy had hidden the mask, slicker and carbine. Cassidy, for the time being, had been trying to remember what he had started out to do.

"Shucks!" he said. "I let the horse go the wrong way. I was tryin' to give Griggs a drink. Sure, that's what I was tryin' to do." He looked down at the slicker wrapped roll. "Shucks! I might's well put a coupla frills on the job."

He did. He dismounted and shook out the slicker. He put it on. Then he tucked the rusty carbine down into the saddle boot. Last of all he slipped the flour bag over his head and adjusted the thing until he could peer out of the eye holes that had been cut in the cloth. He mounted and rode up toward the jail.

"Hey, Griggs," Cassidy hailed cheerfully as he approached the jail. "I don't like the idea."

"What idea, the idea of giving me a drink?"

"Nope! The idea of Whiting taking you over to the jug in Pinkerton."

"Hell! D'you think I like it, either? What I want to know is how'n blazes you got out of this coop. Get me out the same way."

"Oh, you want to get out of there?"

"Naw. Of course not! I like it in here."

"Would you rather get a drink or get out?"

"You're as drunk as hell!" said Mr. Griggs.

"That's good news. I wasn't sure." Cassidy had shaken out the rope that had been coiled on Mac's saddle. He flipped one end of it upward. The brass honda went between two of the window bars and fell inside the jail.

"Tie on to one of them bars," Cassidy ordered. "I'll snake the bar away, then you can squeeze out."

"You can't pull any of these bars out," Griggs said doubtfully.

"Who says I can't? Who's gonna stop me?"

"The danged bars are too strong," wailed Mr. Griggs. "You'll only bust the rope or the cinch."

"Thasso? You ain't proved it yet. Quit them arguments that you can't prove—and tie on to a bar. I'm s'posed to be a detective, and I need you to help me."

"Help you do what?"

"What difference does it make? I dunno myself—yet."

"You're gifted," said Griggs, "you're sure gifted, if you got that way on less than one bottle. I'm tying; go ahead and bust the rope."

The rope had been handmade from Mexican fiber. It was thicker than the average rope; it was exceptionally strong. Cassidy was forking an expensive stock saddle. Beneath its covering of leather and wrapping of latigo was a steel horn that was an integral part of the steel tree. The rope or the cincha or the window bar would break before the horn would.

Cassidy took a few dallies of the rope around the horn and headed the horse downhill. The rope went tight, very tight. The saddle leather creaked from the strain. Cassidy, with one foot free from the stirrup, twisted around to watch the effect, if any, that the pull of the rope was having on the window bar. His left hand held the dallied rope; his right was grasping the cantle.

CHAPTER XIII

A TRUSTY ESCAPED PRISONER

AT THAT moment Sheriff Whiting walked around a corner of the jail, not over twenty feet from Cassidy. The sheriff was walking sidewise, his right hand ahead of him. This

hand held a Colt .45. His left hand had been holding the reins of his saddlehorse, which he had been leading. He promptly dropped the reins.

"Stick 'em up!" he barked.

Even before this command had been uttered, Cassidy had had a scant moment in which to decide his course of action. He had decided quickly. His right hand on the cantle was very, very close to the butt of his Colt. He had not buckled the front of the slicker; his elbow had brushed back the right hand half of the open front. For perhaps one tenth of a second his instinct was to drop the greater portion of his anatomy down behind the horse and simultaneously reach for his gun. But it took less than one tenth of a second for him to decide that this would be a very effective way of committing suicide. To begin with, he was slightly off his balance; it would take a fatal moment to regain his equilibrium.

Cassidy realized immediately that the sheriff had every advantage. He was standing on solid ground. He could shoot the horse first and then leisurely pick as a target any one of several portions of Cassidy before Cassidy could get into action.

Cassidy quit—cold. It was the only thing to do, for that was the way the sheriff had him—cold. Cassidy's left hand had instinctively dropped the rope, which released the strain on it. The horse went a few feet down the slope, then swung around until it faced uphill. Cassidy, regaining his balance, had raised his hands.

"Pull that bag off your head!" The sheriff was grimly triumphant; he was very much pleased with himself.

Cassidy jerked the mask away.

The sheriff lost his pleased expression, and went into a string of angry oaths.

"I oughta 'a' known it," he finished weakly. "You danged fool, what was you tryin' to do here?"

"Who? Me?" Cassidy grinned—he simply had to—at the swift change of expression from triumph to anger and disappointment. "I was only tryin' to pull out that bar up there."

"My Gawd, but you're crazy!" said the sheriff. "I've met a lot of dang' fool idjuts in my life, but you're sure the pick of the herd."

"Like Miss Ruth said to me today, 'Is that supposed to be a compliment'?" Cassidy inquired, grinning widely.

"No, you danged fool; I was tryin' to insult you."

Sheriff Whiting scowled ferociously. Then he shoved his Colt into its holster, turned away and sat down with his back against a corner of the jail. He pulled out a bag of tobacco and a book of papers, and tried to roll a cigaret. He tore the first paper and cursed fluently.

Cassidy did not know what to make of it. He scratched his head as he watched what he thought were queer actions on the part of the sheriff.

"Hey," he finally blurted out, "ain't you gonna arrest me?"

"Who? Me?" Whiting inquired, with a heavy attempt at imitating the way Cassidy had spoken the two words a minute before. "Hell, I couldn't even insult you!" Whiting seemed to feel better. He succeeded in his second attempt at rolling a cigaret.

"I oughta arrest you for petty larceny, at that," he continued. "Is that a bottle in your shirt?"

"Yeh, that's a bottle."

"Mac's bottle?"

"You can't prove it," grinned Cassidy, grasping the bottle by the neck and pulling it out.

"You win!" grinned the sheriff. "Mac's bottle was nearly full. That one is danged near empty. Nope, it can't be the same bottle. But you better hand it over to me. I want to make an official investigation."

THE SHERIFF investigated to the extent of drinking about one third of the remaining contents. Then he lighted the cigaret. He shifted around to a more comfortable position, nursing the bottle in one hand and the cigaret in the other.

"Don't let me interfere," he said. "Just go ahead and try to pull that bar out of the window. I want to be amused. I sure crave entertainment."

"Don'tcha know that I'm tryin' to get Griggs out of jail?" Cassidy looked dubious.

"Sure, I know what you're tryin' to do. Go ahead and do it."

It was too much for Cassidy. Sheriffs as a rule had peculiar ideas as to the sanctity of jails. Here was a sheriff inviting the very thing that sheriffs were supposed not to like.

"Don't let me stop you," said Whiting. "It ain't my jail; I don't care what you do to it."

"Don't you want Griggs to take back with you to Pinkerton?"

"I sure don't!" said Whiting. "I didn't arrest Griggs. Mac arrested him. I couldn't argue Mac out of doing it. Far be it from me to stop an officer of the law from doing what he considers to be his duty. Hell, Cassidy, I couldn't stop Mac—short of pulling a gun on him. And it wouldn't 'a' been right for me to do that. Would it?"

"What you tryin' to do?" Cassidy demanded. "Are you tryin' to get me to do your thinkin' for you? Shucks! I was tryin' to get Griggs outa jail so's he could help me do my own thinkin'."

"Get him out, if you can," said the sheriff. "Maybe he can help both of us." Whiting took a frugal drink and started to roll another cigaret.

"Say—" Cassidy scratched his head again—"don't you know I'm s'posed to be an escaped prisoner?"

"Are you?" The sheriff hitched himself around into a slightly more comfortable position. "What of it?"

"Yeh, I sure am. Ain't you wonderin' why I was wearin' this slicker and that flour sack for a mask?"

"I ain't, not after seein' what happened to this bottle. You see, Cassidy, my good friend, Bill Collier, told me never to wonder about anything you ever do. He says you do danged fool things—and that they allus get unexpected results. I respect Bill's judgment. I'm gonna watch you do a danged fool thing—and I'm gonna sit here and hope for results. I've tried everything else, so now all I'm gonna do is hope."

"Well, Mac is your good friend, too, and he won't like havin' his jail busted open."

"You're no jail breaker!" said Whiting. "You can't bust this tight little jug open with words. I tried words on Mac, but he can out talk me. He was my friend, to be sure, but we had an argument. He says I'm blind because I can't see plain evidence. All right, I'm blind right now—officially. I ain't the sheriff right now, savvy? The sheriff is takin' a vacation. What you see squattin' right here is just a neutral spectator. I feel sad. I'd like to laugh. I'll laugh if you can get Griggs out of there."

"I PASS," said Cassidy. "My cards—meanin' my imagination—ain't strong enough. Why don't you want to take Griggs and me over to the Pinkerton lockup?"

"Because, well, I may be blind, but I sure hate to be a danged fool. I'd be a danged fool if I ever jugged you and Griggs. You and him ain't bandits. I checked up on your story about your hoss bein' shot. You didn't shoot your own hoss, that's certain. The hoss ain't got a busted laig, or nawthin'. Griggs didn't shoot your hoss—or you wouldn't be tryin' to get him out of jail. Miss Ruth is plumb right smart. I believe every word she says."

"You do? Well, to me she don't make no bones about sayin' that Mac must be the bandit."

"That's the only thing she says that I can't believe. Mac can't be the bandit. Why, he's a poor man. He borrows money from me, reg'lar, between paydays. He gets as much wages as I do, but he spends all his money at the bar when he goes over to Reynolds. That's his weakness. Now, quit talkin' and get Griggs out of there. Cripes! you've got to get Griggs out of there! I'll be danged

if I want to make a danged fool of myself by takin' him over to Pinkerton, or by lettin' him escape from me on purpose while I'm takin' him over. Don't pay any attention to me. Just go ahead with what you was doin'."

"I savvy now, kinda," said Cassidy.

He picked up the rope, again took the dallies on the horn and urged the horse downhill. The iron bar in the window failed to yield in the slightest, but the rope broke at the place where it was tied to the bar.

"Just what I thought would happen," said the sheriff. "I never did have any real luck."

"Is that so?" Cassidy snapped out. "If you're so doggone interested, why don't you help?"

"Can't!" grinned Whiting. "I'd sure like to, but it wouldn't look right."

"In that case, I'll make it look right," said Cassidy, urging the horse back toward the sheriff. Cassidy dismounted, took off the encumbering slicker and tossed it aside. He flipped out his Colt and covered Whiting. "Take off your gun belt!" he ordered. "Get on your feet, then unbuckle the belt—and let it drop."

"Sure!" Whiting grinned broadly. "Why didn't you think of doin' it before? I've sure give you every chance. It wouldn't be right for me to help you—willingly; but now when you pull a gun on me and *make* me do it, why, that's different."

"Hand over that bottle!" Cassidy ordered. "You ain't to be trusted with it."

"Hey!" Griggs called out. "Where's that drink you promised?"

"Right here," said Cassidy. "I'm takin' it now."

"But you promised it to me," said Griggs.

"Thasso, too, ain't it?"

Cassidy had taken a drink. He looked at the bottle, then grinned at the sheriff.

"Reach out your arm, Griggs. There's just one skinny drink left."

"Don't rob yourself," said Griggs in a peevish tone.

"I ain't robbin' myself. The sheriff thought maybe he was gonna get this drink. He ain't. I'm robbin' him."

"Well, hurry up and do it!" the sheriff advised nervously. "Get that bottle out of sight; here comes Miss Ruth."

"That's good news," said Cassidy.

"She's on horseback."

"That's still better news. Is there a rope on her saddle?"

"Yes, but the minister is with her."

"That's even better."

Cassidy had urged his horse beneath the window. He stood up in the stirrups and placed the neck of the bottle within Griggs' eager fingers. The fingers disappeared. So did the bottle.

"Is the minister on horseback?" Cassidy inquired.

"He is."

"And there's a rope on the saddle?"

"No, I can't see none."

"Shucks! I knew that the luck couldn't keep up. You explain to 'em what we're gonna do. I'm gettin' another rope." Cassidy turned the blue roan downhill, toward Mac's barn.

"I can't tell them," the sheriff wailed. "I'm supposed to be helpin' you because you're makin' me do it."

"That's your trouble, not mine," chuckled Cassidy over his shoulder. "If you want Griggs outa jail, just say so. I betcha that Miss Ruth will help you convert the minister. Four horses and four ropes on that iron bar will make somethin' happen." Cassidy chuckled again. "You do the explaining."

CASSIDY'S chuckling exit had left Sheriff Whiting uttering profane words under his breath. The sheriff really wanted Griggs out of the jail, but he had desired to alibi himself with the excuse that Cassidy had held a gun on him. With Cassidy's disappearance into the barn, which coincided with the arrival of the girl and the minister with their horses within a few feet of the sheriff, the latter was forced to jump to one side of the fence; he could no longer straddle it. Whiting tried to talk, but was so

confused that he stammered and stuttered.

"Was that Mr. Cassidy riding Mac's horse?" the girl inquired.

"Ye-ah—it was." The sheriff gulped nervously.

"Don't act as though you were afraid of us," she continued. "You're among friends. In case you do not know it, Mac was right; it was I who borrowed the key from the office safe to unlock the jail and release Mr. Cassidy. I think that it was utterly ridiculous for Mac to lock him up. Don't you?"

"Ye-ah, kinda!" A gulp. "The truth is—uh!—"

The sheriff stopped speaking. He tried to moisten his lips with his tongue, and at the same time wiped moisture from his brow. He cast a desperate glance down the hill. Much to his relief, he saw that Cassidy was returning.

"Go on," the girl prompted him. "The truth is—what? A pause. The sheriff did not answer. "Possibly," she continued, "you have come to realize that no one but Mac could be the bandit."

"No, I ain't!" Whiting blurted out. "But I know danged well that Cassidy or Griggs ain't the bandit. So, you see—uh—well, Mac is my friend, and I couldn't talk him out of locking up Cassidy, and then Griggs. Mac is sot in his beliefs. But at the same time I ain't gonna make a darned fool out of myself by takin' Griggs over to Pinkerton City. So, you see; Cassidy—uh—we—uh—"

At that moment Cassidy rode up and stopped within ten feet of the harassed sheriff. The latter, with relief, had been watching every step the blue roan had taken up the hill.

"Say, Cassidy, tell 'em the truth," Whiting implored. "Didn't you pull a gun on me and wasn't you—ain't you—gonna force me to help you."

"I sure did," said Cassidy. "I left you here plumb hypnotized so's you couldn't move a foot until I got back." He grinned at the girl and the minister. "Hello, folks," he said to them. "You're just in time to help us. I'm sure that you're willing."

"Help do what?" Ruth inquired.

"Shucks! Ain't Whiting told you? We're gonna get Griggs outa this jail. Everybody agrees that he shouldn't be in there, so we'll just natch'ly up and get him out. I ain't made any secret of it, Miss Ruth, not with the sheriff, that you had the idea of letting me out. I—"

"But," she interrupted, "you shouldn't have told him!"

"I did, and there's no harm done. Whiting is with you and for you. Ain't you, Whiting?" A grin.

"Ye-ah! I sure am! But—" pleadingly—"I hope this talk ain't goin' no farther. You got to consider my position. I'm the sheriff and, officially, it ain't right that I should countenance any of these here goings on, such as jail breaks. You see how I stand, don't you?" The sheriff picked up his gun belt and buckled it on.

"We sure do!" said Cassidy, with disarming enthusiasm. "Now let's get Griggs outa jail. I need Griggs. He's gonna help me do a lotta thinking. Ain't you, Griggs?" he asked, raising his voice.

"Shut up, you danged fool!" was the answer. "Don't yell loud like that! The whole danged town'll hear you."

" 'Scuse me, mister," said Cassidy, dismounting to pick up the rope that had been broken in his lone attempt to pull out an iron bar from the window. He coiled the rope and sent part of the coil up through the bars. "Take two turns around the bar before you tie it this time," he instructed.

"What are you trying to do?" the minister inquired, speaking for the first time.

"We ain't tryin', we're gonna," said Cassidy. "We're gonna snatch a bar outa there so's Griggs can squeeze out."

"But—" the minister began.

"There ain't no 'buts'," Cassidy hastened to interrupt. He reached for the piece of manila rope that hung in a coil on the horn of the saddle on the blue roan. "This is the rope you can use." *Flip!* It went up through the bars.

"If you got any doubts," Cassidy continued, "you just put 'em up to the sheriff. When the sheriff himself is

gonna help—well, that oughta be enough to make any law abidin' citizen chip in and help." Cassidy grinned cheerfully at Whiting.

The minister did not look at the sheriff; he looked at the girl, who nodded her head and started loosening the saddle strings with which her riata had been tied. The nod and the finger action sufficed to convert the minister. The sheriff had likewise seen the nod; he removed the one foot he had tried to keep on the fence.

"Sure, Reverend," he said, "this is a peaceful way of getting Griggs out of jail. The only other way wouldn't be peaceful; we'd have to fight Mac to get the two keys he's got. When you come right down to it, I'm against fightin'—jest like you are."

"I am certain, brother, that the ends of justice are being served in this unusual procedure; therefore I shall willingly lend my assistance to the utmost," the minister responded. "I trust that my horse possesses sufficient strength to do his part."

"Don't you worry none about the horse," said Cassidy. "The horse will do his part. All you gotta do is pray that your rope is strong."

Cassidy threw a brief professional glance at the minister's heavy stock saddle and then at the front cinch of the double rig, and was satisfied.

FOUR ropes, all possessing more or less strength, had been tied near the center of the same iron bar. The minister had his eyes open. He watched Cassidy. He took the same number of dallies around his saddle horn and firmly held the end of the rope in the same way that Cassidy did. He did not want to be regarded as an amateur; he imitated Cassidy's every movement. To be sure, the minister had certain small doubts, but a glance at the sheriff served to dispel them. Whiting was doing his share to carry out the program. The girl was already urging her horse forward. The minister gained confidence and did likewise.

Four horses, with a downhill pull, drew taut the four ropes that were dallied on four saddle horns.

"Hey!" Cassidy yelped. "Steady and easy does it. We don't want none of them ropes to break." He looked back along his own rope to the iron bar.

The bar was not bending, apparently, in the slightest. But he heard something wrench loose, or start to wrench loose. He thought that the wooden sockets, holding the bar, were beginning to break.

"It's coming out—without bending," said Cassidy. "Hop to it!"

The jail was eight feet by eight feet in dimensions and, inside, it was eight feet from floor to ceiling. Above the board ceiling, supported by unnecessarily stout rafters, was the inverted V quarter pitch roof of heavy hand made shingles. The structure was slightly topheavy.

Cassidy had heard something begin to wrench or tear loose, but he had been mistaken in his judgment. The bottom layer of the crisscrossed one inch boards in the floor had been nailed to three logs. The logs had rotted more or less during many years, and the nails had lost a lot of their authority. What Cassidy had heard was some of the nails pulling loose from the logs. The far side of the jail had risen a few inches, but Cassidy had failed to notice this; he was too interested in that one thick iron bar. The window was high up. The top of it was just under the eaves, thus giving the horses the best of it when it came to leverage.

The strong iron bar had refused to give in the slightest. The building itself did not refuse. It had started to rise on one edge. The only person among those present who was aware of this was Griggs. Griggs let out one long yell of alarm. Cassidy heard it. He couldn't help hearing it. Possibly a dozen people in Oro Mañana heard it. Cassidy mistook it for encouragement.

He faced down the hill for a moment, saw that his horse had clear footing ahead, then looked anxiously at his rope, hoping that it would not break. He started to congratulate himself and the others.

Something was giving. Something certainly was.

Sheriff Whiting let loose a yell of alarm, simultaneously casting loose the rope from his saddle horn. Cassidy looked back up the hill. His jaw dropped and momentarily froze in that position. Mechanically he let go of his rope. The dallies spun off the horn as his horse went forward a few steps before he could pull it up. The jail had raised up on one edge and was teetering.

Ruth Robertson had cast off her dallies a split second before Cassidy had let go of his rope. She immediately saw what was happening and screamed frantically at the minister. The latter's horse had just settled down nicely to putting its weight on the rope. The minister glanced wildly at Ruth when she screamed. He looked at her face, not at her saddle horn. He saw her signaling, motioning with her hands for him to cast loose and, a bit incoherently, yelling. For a moment he failed to understand. While his mind groped for the explanation to all this fuss, with everybody shouting at him—Griggs, within the jail, yelling the loudest—the minister dumbly, mechanically, clung to the rope wrapped around his saddle horn.

The minister's horse, meanwhile, kept moving. So did the jail.

"Let go! Let go!" the girl screamed at the minister.

"Drop that rope!" Cassidy yelped.

"Leggo, leggo!" the sheriff barked. "Leggo the rope!"

"Stop! Griggs yelped, despairing. "Quit! Stop!"

It took perhaps two seconds for the minister to realize that something was wrong. But this scant passage of time, with his horse meanwhile pulling enthsuiastically, sufficed to do the mischief. The uptilted jail overbalanced—just a trifle, but a trifle too much. The minister finally let go of the rope. He looked behind. He saw the jail slowly tilting down toward him. The jail tilted farther and faster. It was toppling, downhill, toward the horses.

CHAPTER XIV

CASSIDY ROLLS ONE

"GET UP!" Cassidy yelled. "Move! Get your horses away!" He regretted his lack of spurs, but thumped lustily with his heels, heading his horse along the hill. In passing, he reached out with his good foot, not the one with the sprained ankle, and planted a hearty kick where it would do the most good on the minister's horse. The resulting jump on the part of the animal almost served to unseat the minister and leave him right in the path of the descending jail. But the minister instinctively grabbed the horn with both hands and managed to stick on while the horse buck jumped out of danger. The girl and the sheriff were both instinctive when it came to horsemanship; they easily, casually, moved their horses. The danger path was narrow; the jail was only eight feet wide.

Inside the jail, Griggs had despairingly flung himself to the uphill edge of the tilting jail floor, hoping that his weight would suffice to make the structure flop back to its foundations. In time there was perhaps a difference of half a second between success and failure in Griggs' effort. But in that one half of a second the minister's horse had kept pulling. Griggs slid back down the floor. With a creaking, smashing thump the building struck the downhill slope. The ends of the shingles, projecting a bare two inches beyond the wall, were crumpled. Griggs slid down the wall to the window. He grabbed the bars, and held on.

The next moment, with a clatter of splintering shingles, the jail had part of its roof on the ground. It kept moving. And when it came down from rolling over on the peak of the roof, the little boxlike jail had a running start. It went faster. *Thump-crash!* Twice it rolled completely over—*thump! thump!—crash—thump!*—at each revolution. The very steep hill gave it momentum for its final bouncing leap through space.

The takeoff for this final jump was

twelve or fifteen feet up the hill from MacDonald's little cottage. The jail neatly hurdled this distance. It crashed solidly, heavily, against the cottage, and dropped to the ground. The jail had ceased traveling, but the cottage had only started. The two room shack had shivered violently and bent slightly at the crashing impact. Then, slowly, the foundations gave way.

The uphill side of the cottage had rested practically on the ground. The lower side had been supported by uprights that were about seven feet in height. Just below, the ground began to level out to the partly sloping flat that was fenced in as a corral. And the seven foot uprights had been knocked downhill to a 45° angle; they now refused to support the weight of the cottage. With rasping squeals, spikes and nails pulled free as the structure swayed and creaked—and moved downhill. It moved downhill a distance that approximated the length of the uprights that had supported it on the lower side. It finally came to rest, its floor tilted sharply upward, about seven feet below where it had been. The accompaniment had been the clatter and banging of dishes and pans as they slid from the cupboard shelves.

The four would-be jail deliverers had watched with fascinated horror the plunging leaps and rolls the jail had taken. They had shivered in sympathy as the jail had struck and caused the cottage to shiver and move. But their shivering, horrified sympathy had been for Griggs. Cassidy had ridden down the hill in the wake of the dust cloud the jail had stirred up.

"Hey, Griggs!" he called. "Are you still there?"

"How the hell could I help being here?" was the indignant response from Mr. Griggs.

Cassidy grinned. He faced up the hill.

"Griggs is all right," he shouted.

"The hell I'm all right!" Griggs yelped. "You've sure went and messed things up plenty."

"We couldn't help it—about the jail rolling down," said Cassidy. "I'm sure glad you ain't hurt. If you was hurt you wouldn't have all that lung power left. You better shut up till you count ten. Miss Ruth is right close at hand."

"You fool," said Griggs, lowering his voice slightly. "You don't know what's happened."

"What's happened—except that you got a free trip and knocked Mac's house clean off its pins."

"The door of this danged jail is flat on the ground," said Griggs. "How you ever goin' to get me out of here—now?"

CASSIDY looked up the hill—and groaned. The girl, the minister and the sheriff were riding down toward him. That was all right, but beyond them, farther up the hill, several citizens of Oro Mañana were coming on the dead run. And each passing second saw another one, or two or three, appearing over the brow of the hill. Each and every one stopped momentarily at the top. Each man, woman and child took one look, saw that the jail was not in its usual position and hastened downward.

"Hey," said Cassidy, as the sheriff approached, "I thought this was gonna be private."

"My Gawd!" Whiting exclaimed. "I'm ruined! A hell of a sheriff I am! If they find out that I had a hand in this job I'll lose—next election—every vote in Oro Mañana and everywhere else. I'm plumb ruined!"

Ruth Robertson had lent one ear to this conversation, but her gaze had centered on Mac's tilted cottage. She swung her horse farther from the jail and nearer the house.

"Oh, Mr. Cassidy! Oh—Mr. Whiting! Oh—*look!* It's right there!" She pointed.

"What is?" Cassidy inquired. Then he noted the girl's obviously excited air. He rode around to help her look. "By golly!" he chirped. "That sure looks like my hat. My twenty-two dollar and four bits hat."

He had dismounted and was now limping forward to investigate. He walked

to the bit of ground between the jail and the cottage, the bit of steep ground that had been beneath Mac's cottage.

He saw that it was his hat. He started to pick it up. Then he froze momentarily, one hand still held down toward the hat. Twice he blinked, deliberately, just to make sure that his eyes were not deceiving him. Then he continued his delayed stoop, but instead of picking up his pet hat he picked up a heavy bar of gold from the top of a little heap of them. There were a dozen or so in the heap.

Cassidy looked at the gold. His mind absolutely quit working, except that he vaguely wondered how a brick so small could be so heavy. Then he looked back over his shoulder. Several more or less prominent citizens of Oro Mañaba had arrived. They were treading on the heels of the girl and the sheriff, who had dismounted and were approaching. Three small boys eagerly darted in ahead of everybody.

"Gee!" said one of the lads. "You're sure a bang-up detective, Mr. Cassidy. You jest snooted out the gold, didn't you, Mr. Cassidy?" Stark admiration shone in the youthful eyes.

The words broke Cassidy's tension. He grinned, perhaps a bit sheepishly.

"Son," he said, "I'm plumb willin' to take your kind words at face value. Sometimes us detectives has a bit of luck. I just had a flock of it."

"You detected all them gold bars, didn't you, Mr. Cassidy?" the youthful admirer persisted. "Hi, Jimm-me-e!" he squealed, catching sight of a crony coming on the run. "Mr. Cassidy jest now detected a hundred gold bars that belong to Miss Robertson. He snooted 'em out, he did."

"Now," the girl's voice broke in, "now, Mr. Whiting will you believe that Mac is the bandit? Will you arrest him? Doesn't this evidence speak for itself?"

"Maybe," said the sheriff. "Say, Cassidy, how d'you reckon them bars got here?"

"One by one," said Cassidy, with no attempt at humor.

Several of the citizens snickered. Cassidy frowned at them.

"I GOT an idea, Sheriff, that they must have been dropped down through a hole in Mac's floor. Just like my hat was," he added, dropping the bar of gold an picking up his pet headgear. He shucked the old hat he had been wearing, and replaced it with his pet.

"Hey!" came Griggs' voice through the window bars, which were now facing the sky. "What's going on out there? What was the kid yellin' about gold bars?"

"We found 'em," Cassidy replied. "Every one that was stole, I reckon, except that one that was found in your sack of flour. They had been hid under Mac's house."

"That fixes it!" Griggs yelped. "I been tryin' all along to place the bandit's voice. He tried to change it, but I remember every word that was ever spoke to me when I got held up. It was Mac's voice—changed, some."

"Speakin' of Mac," drawled one phlegmatic, middle aged citizen, after spitting out half a gill of tobacco juice, "here he comes now. He looks kinda mad, too."

MacDonald was coming down the hill. He was taking deliberate and long steps. It was a queer sort of stride; he seemed to be raising his knees too high and methodically sinking his heels, a belligerent stalky pace.

"You kids git out of here!" the usually phlegmatic citizen suddenly barked out. "Git! Scoot! Mac's liable to start shooting!"

A plain and direct order to the small lads would have been futile, but the hint that Mac might start shooting more than sufficed to remove the lads and the two bold and very young feminists who were known locally as "them tomboys". In fact, the hint served to remove as if by magic all but two of the curious citizens. One of the two onlookers who remained was the phlegmatic gentleman. He not only remained; he again sized up Mac's belligerent air and looked pleased, or amused, or something. He turned away

from Miss Ruth in order to spit out a huge quid. He then produced a plug of tobacco, which he held in his left hand as with his teeth he mangled off a fresh chew. His right hand, meanwhile, unfastened the buttons on the front of his double breasted coat. Then he hooked his right thumb nonchalantly beneath the left lapel of his gaudy vest. His right foot went back a few inches and stayed there. He looked as if he were ready to deliver the official Fourth of July oration in any small town. All he needed to complete the picture was the flag decorated speaker's stand.

And then MacDonald arrived. His eyes glared and flamed as he took in the situation. He saw the exposed pile of ingots. No one said a word. The only person who moved was the minister, who edged forward and to one side a few steps, at the same time reaching out with one arm to thrust Miss Ruth behind him.

"Mac!" The sheriff finally broke the silent tension. "Mac, it looks kinda bad for you."

Whiting's tone was more or less an attempt at being conciliatory. He hated his job; Mac had been his friend.

"Does it?" Mac centered a burning gaze on Whiting. "What are you goin' to do about it?"

"I'm sorry, Mac, but I'm afraid I'll—"

"I'm sorry, too,Whitey. I'm sorry, for you!"

With that, Mac's fingers snapped to the butt of the Colt that projected from the holster on his right thigh. The fingers, half bent, like claws, had never been more than two inches from the gun as he had stalked up to the silent group. The Colt came out and up. But Mac's technique was wrong. He was a fast gunman, but it was necessary for the muzzle of his Colt to rise high and fall again before the hammer of the weapon would slip from beneath his thumb and explode the cartridge.

The muzzle of Mac's Colt went up. A terribly scant fraction of a second was all that it would take for the muzzle to come down and belch smoke. Whiting was more than an average fast gunman, but Mac's action had been so swift and without warning that the sheriff had been caught flat footed. He had thought and hoped that he could disarm Mac with words. Vain thoughts and hopes. Mac could out talk and out shoot, and out think Whiting, could give the latter a head start and beat him easily.

Cassidy had turned his left side to Mac. He had quietly pulled out his Colt and cocked it. He had held it concealed behind his right leg. The middle aged, tobacco chewing, phlegmatic gentleman had slipped his thumb from his vest lapel. The thumb had slowly moved a few inches, to curl over the hammer of a Colt in an armpit holster. The fingers of the same hand had lovingly closed on the revolver butt.

And just when the muzzle of Mac's Colt was ready to descend, a bullet from Cassidy's .44 smashed Mac in the pit of the stomach. The quiet man had been standing downhill from Mac. There was no waste motion in the cross draw from the armpit holster. The Colt came out, swung in a short arc and spat. The bullet smashed the bone in Mac's arm halfway between the shoulder and elbow. Mac's Colt boomed, as the hammer slipped from beneath a thumb suddenly rendered nerveless, but the bullet went at an angle toward the sky.

Mac tried to shoot again, but the Colt dropped clear of his fingers, as his right arm fell. Mac's knees buckled beneath his weight as he doubled forward. He collapsed and slid for several feet down the steep hillside.

SHERIFF WHITING was the first man to reach Mac, who had fallen face down. Whiting gently turned him over; he choked down a sob as he saw the changed look in MacDonald's eyes. The flaming, insane light had gone out of them; they looked hurt, bewildered, reproachful.

"Mac," the sheriff cried out, "were you really the bandit? I can't believe it!"

MacDonald tried to speak. He could not. But he nodded his head.

Cassidy felt much more sorry for the sheriff than he did for Mac. Whiting was taking it hard. Cassidy was not. Cassidy had spent the better part of a score of years in a hard school. He had often seen the application of a hard law—the law of the gun. And in his own way he twisted this law around as a liberal application of one of the few things in the Bible that had stuck in his mind. The law of the sword.

And now uppermost in Cassidy's mind was the thought of the men who had been killed when the stage had been held up. Cassidy did his best at what might be called searching his soul, but he failed to find any reason for sympathizing with or for MacDonald. He was really sorry for Whiting; and that was as far as his sorrow or sympathy went. The fact that MacDonald had been robbing two women of their patrimony might have had much to do with Cassidy's state of mind.

Meanwhile, the timid but curious citizens had ventured to return. More of them were coming down the hill. Word that MacDonald had been shot had spread with mysterious rapidity. Men from the mine were coming, running. A full score of them came straggling over the hill.

Cassidy limped down, to kneel beside MacDonald, who glared at him hatefully. They were surrounded now by a ring of curious citizens, a few miners among them.

"Mac," said Cassidy, "maybe the truth will help you. Did you shoot Breck?"

MacDonald gathered enough strength to speak.

"Go to hell!" he spat out. "*You* killed Breck!"

"That lie ain't gonna help you none, Mac," said Cassidy. "You ain't liable to be with us much longer. Hadn't you better take a peaceful mind with you when you go?"

Cassidy did not know that Miss Mary Robertson had appeared. She was right behind him. MacDonald's wandering gaze centered on her face. He saw genuine sorrow and sympathy there.

" 'Lo, boss," he croaked out. "Me and Breck was workin' to collect my share of what was comin' to me. Breck wanted too much. I had to sneak in and shoot him with his own gun."

Cassidy turned to look over his shoulder. He saw the pale face of the spinster mine owner. She was turning a pale green around her lips. Her bleak face screwed up and contorted with queer muscular jerks. Then she burst into tears. Ruth threw an arm around her aunt's shoulders, and led her away.

Mac, with an effort, moved his head until he saw the sheriff.

"Whitey," he whispered harshly, "you're awful simple. You—" Mac was not able to finish the sentence. He made throaty noises—and died.

AS AN anticlimax came Griggs' voice—

"Hey, Cassidy, what's goin' on out there?"

"Mac's dead!" Cassidy told him.

"Well, it ain't your fault that I'm still alive," Griggs shouted. "I've got four hundred and eleven bruises. I need a doctor, or something. Get me out of here, if you can."

Cassidy gingerly searched MacDonald's overall pockets. He found several keys, among which was one attached to a cardboard tag bearing the word "Jail." He took this key and rose to his feet.

"All right, boys," he said, looking around at the miners and other citizens. "See if you can raise her up so's I can unlock the door."

He limped around to the uphill side of the jail.

Immediately there was a grand scramble for hand holds. The jail was too small to allow even one third of the willing hands to assist. Four men, miners, immediately started fist fights over what might be called priority rights. These enthusiasts were ignored; there were too many men to take their places in assisting to rescue Griggs. The uphill side of the

jail was lifted until the edge of the floor beneath the barred window rested heavily against the wall of Mac's cottage. The jail stayed there of its own weight.

Cassidy walked beneath the slightly overhanging jail wall. He unlocked the door, which immediately flapped down. Griggs darted out and made his way several yards from the jail. The miners parted to give him a passage through them.

"Hey, Griggs," a miner inquired, "was you in the jail when it rolled down the hill?"

"Naw!" Griggs retorted scornfully. "I waited till it quit rollin' and then busted my way into it."

"How do you feel, Griggs?" asked a sympathizer.

"Awful! I feel all busted up." Griggs saw Miss Robertson being led up the hill by her niece. He looked around at the miners. "I sure feel worse than awful. I feel like hell. Who the hell's got a drink handy? I sure need one." He looked hopefully around, but drew a blank.

The sheriff willingly gave to the minister the job of taking care of MacDonald's body, which was carried into the down tilted cottage. The sheriff himself took charge of the gold bars. He called for assistants, and there was so much enthusiasm and rivalry that another fist fight started. The gold went up the hill, to be locked in the office safe. Each bar was carried by a willing miner, and each carrier had an escort of two or three other miners. The gold was locked up. The carriers, once they had dropped their burdens into the safe, had left the office. Outside, forty or fifty miners waited. Only the sheriff remained within.

Then the miners left the vicinity. Some genius had suggested a good idea. The miners, in a straggling body, went down to Frank's place. Furthermore, they entered boldly by the front door.

In the meantime Cassidy had mounted the blue roan. He left one stirrup free and invited Griggs to use it. Griggs climbed up and forked the roan behind Cassidy.

"And don't ask any questions!" had been Cassidy's final order. "All you've gotta do is hang on to my gun belt.

CHAPTER XV

DELINQUENCY IS ITS OWN REWARD

THE ROAN stood in the alley behind Frank's place. Cassidy and Griggs were seated at a table in the rear room.

"Gosh," said Griggs, "I'm bruised all over."

Frank poked his head through the door from the space behind the bar.

"A coupla bruise removers," Cassidy ordered. "Hundred proof liniment."

Another couple had been ordered and delivered before the miners, *en masse*, entered the front door. And then Frank found himself confronted with a record demand over the bar.

The sheriff entered by way of the rear door. He pulled up a chair, to sit down at the table with Cassidy and Griggs.

"You look awful bad, sad and sorrowful," said Cassidy.

"That's the way I feel," Whiting answered dolefully. "I thought I'd got shocked enough for one day over what happened to Mac, but I got shocked worse than ever a few minutes ago."

"Thasso?" Sympathetically. Cassidy waited for a few seconds, then arose and limped over to the bar door. "Hey, Frank," he yelled, "bring three shock removers."

Frank bustled in and thumped a full quart bottle on the table, also a third glass.

"You'll have to pour your own, gents," he said. "I've got 'em lined up three deep out in front of the bar."

Cassidy poured three fingers for the sheriff, and less than that for himself and Griggs. He immediately refilled Whiting's glass. The sheriff looked very sad.

"Speak up, Sheriff," said Cassidy at length. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble? Oh, nothing, except Ruth just told me she's gonna marry the minister."

A FEW hours later the three of them were seated on a large boulder about twenty feet from Miss Robertson's office. Cassidy took a nip from the whisky bottle and then passed the bottle along. Whiting drank last, then held the bottle in plain sight, on one knee. They watched the door and windows of the office, and waited hopefully for results. There were no results.

So they passed the bottle again, and waited again. They repeated the performance for the third time. And on the third round they took small and frugal nips, afraid that they would empty the bottle too soon.

"Mr. Cassidy! I am very much surprised at you!" It was Ruth Robertson speaking, from a point a few feet behind them.

The sheriff looked over his shoulder. The sheriff was feeling very mellow, to say the least.

"Ain't you su'prised at me, too?"

"No, *Mr.* Whiting—not surprised; only ashamed."

"Tha's sure funny," said Whiting. "Why ain't you surprised?"

"Because, Mr. Whiting, the mastication of coffee beans fails to take the odor from your breath. This fact had more than a little to do with my decision to marry a man who did not chew coffee beans to try to cover or disguise his delinquencies."

"My—what?" gasped the sheriff. "I—uh—I don't—"

"Sure you don't," Griggs chipped in. "You don't wear them things; you wear red flannels."

"Shut up!" Cassidy ordered, frowning at Griggs. "You don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Who don't?"

"You don't!"

"That's what I thought you meant." Griggs reached for the bottle.

The girl was cool, calm and amused. She was trying hard to fight back the dimple that persisted in trying to decorate her cheek. She bit her lips.

"Well," the sheriff said defensively, defiantly, "anyhow, we ain't breakin' any laws."

"What are you trying to do?" she inquired.

Whiting was so red in the face that Cassidy came to the rescue.

"Oh, you want to know why we're sittin' here with this bottle?"

"I certainly do want to know."

"Well, it's s'posed to be a secret, Miss Ruth," said Cassidy, "but I'll let you in on it. We've been tryin' to shock a flock of principles—firm and fixed."

The dimple broke into plain view.

"I suspected something like that," she said, "but you three children have been wasting your time."

"How come?"

"Auntie isn't in the office. She is home and in bed."

"Gosh! We sure drew a blank, didn't we. Is the boss really sick?"

"Not exactly. She is suffering from shock, more than anything else."

"Uh!"

Cassidy looked at the bottle in Griggs' hands. He grabbed it, for a better look. He took his time in squinting at it to gage how many drinks were left. About an inch and a half remained in the bottle. He looked up at the girl.

"This here stuff in the bottle is first class shock remover," he said, grinning. "A shot of it might help the boss. Do you want it?"

"Yes."

She took the bottle. She promptly shattered it against the nearest rock. She smiled. It was a broad cheerful smile, almost a huge grin. The dimple was switched on, full force. Her eyes were laughing.

"What I did to that bottle will help auntie more than you boys perhaps realize. I'm going home and tell her that I broke a bottle of whisky. That news will cheer up her whole day. And don't you three boys feel silly and ashamed and ridiculous?"

"It's hard to tell, Miss Ruth," grinned Cassidy. "Maybe we do. But," he added, "I wouldn't bet too much on it!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

AFTER AGUINALDO

I

THE AMERICAN OLD-TIMER

THERE ARE approximately a thousand Americans of the old-timer class, scattered among the seven thousand and eighty-six big and little islands which compose the Philippine archipelago. The majority of them are former service men who came out in 1898-9, and who if they have visited the United States during the interim, returned *madalí*—very quickly—to the land of their adoption.

In age these voluntary exiles are in the neighborhood of fifty, although a few who came out as mere boys may lay claim to the middle forties. The vast majority of them have married Filipino women, and their offspring credit both races.

The average old-timer is not wealthy, but he manages to make a good living in town or country, and is generally liked and respected by the very men who fought against him during Aguinaldo's insurrection. His children, known as *mestizos*, are brought up to consider themselves as Americans, and loyalty to the flag is taught them both in the old-timer's home, and in his lodge room. This very fact precludes all possibility of an uprising of any size against the United States, no matter how the political cat may leap.

Not a few of the old-timers belong to the "never went back" class. This means that they have never gone home, and probably never will, although they laugh and say they may do so when a bridge is constructed across the Pacific. It is pathetic for the new arrival to hear men of his own race discussing the New York

or Chicago which they knew thirty years ago, and to be questioned as to landmarks and hostelries which have long since disappeared or been transformed.

The hospitality of the old-timer is proverbial. On occasion, and especially in the provinces where there are no hotels, he will open his house to the traveller, and entertain him with the best procurable.

In language the average exile is bilingual or perhaps tri-lingual. He speaks in English to his children, in a native dialect to his wife, and sometimes chats in Spanish with the Filipinos of the fast vanishing generation who were educated in that tongue.

The cafés of both the larger cities and the smaller towns form the gathering places for old-timers—men of course, for women of the type are very few. Here they drink the amber brew of San Miguel, as they did in their younger days, and discuss the possibilities of independence being granted to the Philippines. Some say they'll go home when the old flag comes down—if it does. But they won't. They are wedded to the country and have heard the Call of the East.

In food the "boys of Empire Days," as they like to hear themselves called, stick to American *chow*. They patronize cold storage plants, and purchase the best of imported groceries. Filipino food has no charms for them, and a coffee and a roll is no breakfast for men who served Uncle Sam. Manila swarms with American restaurants—real ones—where the native waiters all speak English.

Occupation Day, August 13th, is the old-timer's best *fiesta*. It is the date on which the red and gold banner of Spain came down from the staff on the age-worn walls of Fort Santiago, to be replaced by the stars and stripes. No wonder the old-timer is proud of having helped win a magnificent empire for the United States, and on this day he parades with Filipino veterans who carry their shot torn battle flags. A good citizen, although a voluntary exile, is the American old-timer of the Philippines.—C. A. FREEMAN.

Cockney

A COMRADE found fault with the Australian dialect in a story by an exceedingly accurate member of the Camp-Fire pipe brigade, so we forwarded his letter:

Enclosed please find money order for £1.10.0. English money, being subscription to *Adventure* for so long as it holds out. (The money I mean.) I regret very much that my subscription ran out, but I have been away in the Southern States on business, and forgot to renew it.

As an Australian I have a kick against a story by H. Bedford-Jones in the issue for April 1st. The story "Murder Aboard Ship" is a real good story, but why does the author say, "an Australian by his accent," when he was speaking just ordinary cockney. No Australian uses language like that. I will admit many of them forget aspirates and grammar, but they don't talk like a cockney. This Station is still on the map, though business is slack; we are rather out of the way here, but occasionally I have a caller. Yours fraternally—HENRY VERNON SHEAD, Station 130. Sutton Street, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

And it was answered:

Adventure sent me along your letter objecting to my making an Australian speak plain ordinary cockney. Isn't it a pretty broad statement to say that no Australian talks like a cockney? I've had some Australian friends; and to an ear no better attuned to cockney than Bristol is distant from Bow Bells, they had it down pretty pat, believe me! In fact, nothing could reproduce it but the standard cockney dialect.

However, please believe there was no intention to offend any Australian; and for that matter, I understand that Australia is quite a stretch of ground with a center and four or more sides—intimating that there is no actual "Australian" dialect. All dialect is a most intangible thing, and the best we poor devils of writers can do is to somehow spell it as looks best to each one personally. So bear up under the Southern Cross, old chap—and if you didn't find anything worse to criticise in the yarn, I'm tickled pink.—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

Bug Eye Didn't Know Much

HE ASKED whether Tombstone was *real*. A reader testifies that it was—every bit as real as Wild Bill Hickok's Deadwood.

While I am at it, I notice on page 186 of September 1st *Adventure* that Bug Eye asks a question about Doc Holliday, the Earp boys, Ringo and others of old Tombstone, Arizona, and wants to know if they were real.

Surest thing you know! Men living today knew

them well, and our *official* Arizona historians describe them exactly as they are by Walt Coburn and other Western authors. Writer visits Tombstone frequently and everything is still there—the homes formerly occupied by the Earps *et al*, the Bird Cage Theatre, the saloons where numerous shootings took place and some distance from Tombstone, at old Charleston, there is the tree where they hung "bad men." In the old graveyard some of the tombstones read as follows: "Here lies —— Committed suicide by being too slow with his own gun." Oh yes! Tombstone, Arizona, is very real and so were the Earps, Wyatts, Holliday, Bat Masterson and others. Comrade—D. M. GILLAN.

"Local Boy Makes Good"

KAMLOOPS poet almost wrote a national anthem in the slack season between haying and logging, reports Brother Adamson . . .

Last year you had a fairly long piece about a poet who "delights" the cattle men of British Columbia, and you mentioned the unknown place called Kanlgooree. There is no such place; it is Kamloops that was meant and Douglas Lake is the ranch spoken of, which is sixty miles away from here. Some of us who own property here in Kamloops naturally like to see our town named correctly.

Lately I have come across some lumberjacks who knew the man and had copies of some of his poems, which I gave a dollar for. It seems that the man, Esles, who writes the verses has a portable typewriter and types off epics and peddles them around. Esles has a gift of writing, and he is seen more around the woods than on ranches, and he was at Douglas Lake once or twice for haying. He had the lumberjacks all tickled, as he had written a verse on the boss. Here it is:

The bull of the woods was snorting
As woods bulls usually snort
Snorting in the manner
As woods bulls seem to think they ought
His snorts seem to tell you
That he is a mighty great man.
And no one can put it over him
It's no use thinking that they can.
His stately would-be swagger
Seems to say he is the great He Am
As boss of a short log logging camp
Of course he is the one great man.

The fellows were delighted with that, and claimed it fitted the boss of one camp perfectly.

Around Kamloops there are many who think we have an undiscovered genius; and it seems that others do, too, as the local member of parliament received inquiries from some one pretty prominently placed, about him, and every once in a while news creeps in the papers, not only the local ones, but in the Vancouver papers too. The piece "Our Country" was published in the Kamloops *Sentinel* and certainly made an impression, and there are literally hundreds of copies scattered in the ranch-houses and homesteaders' shacks, as it appealed to the people. There is a tune for it. There has been a question raised about the national anthem for Canada and there are two versions of "O Canada!" Lots of people dislike "O Canada!"—too much like "Oh!"—and fall back on "God Save The King". Even the Princes of Wales, however, smiles at too much "God Save The King". That is why "Our Country" took such a hold. I guess it is due to be accepted as the anthem, the way people talk.

—T. ADAMSON, Kamloops, B. C., Canada.

Our New Magazine

ON THE NEWSSTANDS today is the first number of *Adventure's* new companion in fiction, *Romance*. Back in 1920 this magazine was started, ran a few issues, and then ran head-on into a printers' strike and other vicissitudes, suspending publication perforce.

Now *Romance* is republished, starting under more favorable conditions—and after a long, careful planning which we believe has made it from the start one of the finest of all published magazines.

The feature novel which begins the first issue is "The Sun Virgin," a story of Peru by Thomas Dixon, the author who wrote "The Birth of A Nation," "The Leopard's Spots," "The One Woman," and other popular books and motion pictures.

The Mummy Cases Are Ordered!

POSSIBLY *Adventure* has made too great a fetich, at times, of thoroughgoing accuracy of minute detail; yet even with the best possible thought and care that can be exercised, it seems to me that authors and editors make enough mistakes. So then, why not point them out? I have yet to hear of an author getting angry, or having his inspiration deadened by any friendly criticism of a published tale. But of course, as Comrade Foley points out, certain minor details given inaccurately, should not spoil a reader's enjoyment of a truly *good* story!

I hereby demand the removal of those carping cronies who are monopolizing the Camp-Fire with their captious craving for meticulous accuracy in non-essential details.

And I further decree that their bodies be draped as a gloomy dado around your own office as a penance for your fell work in aiding and abetting them!

For it is, I am sure, the firm opinion of the great majority of readers that the story counts; not the trimmings.

Give us plenty of action and we will not cavil as to whether the hero's hat is on straight, or whether he has red or blue spots on his bandanna.

It seems to be a peculiar mental attribute of some few readers that they will swallow with avidity stories about he-men who tie steers into true-lover's knots, shoot all the pips off a deck of cards, and hold up an entire army with a toy pistol; yet feel it as a personal insult if the author makes a mistake as to the number of buttons on a bell-hop's monkey jacket.

A reasonable measure of accuracy in the trifling details that make up the trimmings of a story is expected and secured from all your yarn-spinners. But don't go and cramp their style by letting them see that you are prepared to devote valuable Camp-Fire space to the peevish utterances of isolated readers who are successful in detecting some insignificant error of detail.—ALAN FOLEY, "Ask Adventure," Bondi, N. S. W., Australia.

THE GRAY LADY

A rhyme of industry

She's a big lady
Lugging no child.
She sits in the yard,
Where pig iron is piled,
And orders around
A sulky crew.
She snaps her fingers
Telling them what to do.
Her words are like things
That cut with a knife
Into the very
Soul and life.
With a go to it now
And don't watch the time.
Don't give me your thoughts
In a dallying rhyme.
Give me your dreams
On a hot steel plate.
Give me your dreams;
It's getting late.

She's a strong lady—
Gray, stel gray.
Her feet dig holes
In the yellow clay
And she laughs as she sticks
Her toe in deep.
And grunts a hallo
That disturbs your sleep.
She's tall and lanky,
As tall as the sky;
With a leathery skin
And a yellow eye.
She's a strange old wench
Who orders around
The first tough bum.
Her tight fists pound
His back until
He falls and drops
To the littered ground
And his heart stops.
With a go to it now
And don't watch the time.
Don't give me your thoughts
In a dallying rhyme.
Give me your dreams
On a hot steel plate.
Give me your dreams;
It's getting late.

Her fingers are white,
The white of steel;
They blister hot
But they're pleasant to feel.
They playfully touch
The big machines
Where her tall body
Presses and leans.
Her arms are long,
Wrapped with iron ropes
That twist around
The laborer's hopes.
He serves her long,
As long as the day.
He spells out a song,
Hidden from the lady,
And written when she's away.
With a go to it now
And don't watch the time.
Don't give me your thoughts
In a dallying rhyme.
Give me your dreams
On a steel plate.
Give me your dreams;
It's getting late.

She's a strange lady,
And no man's wife;
No harlot, no vampire,
But every man's life
Goes into her flesh
Where she heats and she moulds
It until a new thing
Moves as it colds.
Out of her fingers,
Out of her hands;
Men into steel
At her commands—
Men think they boss her,
Handling the controls.
She gives them a fire
To burn their souls.
With a go to it now
And don't watch the time.
Don't give me your thoughts
In a dallying rhyme.
Give me your dreams
On a hot steel plate.
Give me your dreams;
It's getting late.

—RAYMOND KRESENSKY

Clip Sheet

AT THE PRESENT TIME the following suggestion does not seem quite practicable; but I shall be glad indeed to bear it in mind against a time when some adaptation of the idea may be used.

Mighty glad, Comrade Pulling, that *Adventure* has meant just this to you!

May I add a suggestion that I have had in mind for a long time? The pages of Camp-Fire and Ask Adventure (which, in common with many others I always turn to first) contain information that is well worth saving. If I leave it in the magazine I never can find it again, and clippings offer difficulties, for it almost always happens that the other side of the page also carries an article I'd like to save. Why cannot the articles be arranged as they are in *Science News-Letter* (which is published by Science Service)? In that magazine the other side of the page is an advertisement or a continuation of the same article. Such a page would cost more to set up but would the extra cost make the arrangement out of the question?

Adventure means a great deal to me and no one can wish it greater success than I do. I am in an apparatus shop or laboratory practically night and day for about ten months in the year and the problems are rather difficult ones in Bio-Physics. This is quite a change from being with a horse or canoe night and day for months at a time as I used to be when I was younger. *Adventure* not only takes me, very realistically, to places that I should like to see but also back to many places that I have lived and camped in. This helps in two ways, one of which may sound odd: First, the scenes are mostly out-of-doors and it is quite a rest to feel out-of-doors for a couple of hours. I sleep and work better for it. In the second place I see my old stamping grounds through the observant, intelligent eyes of another and always he sees something I missed, or interprets an old fact in a new way, or links old facts in a new way. I find that an extraordinary stimulus; and I go into the laboratory and see commonplace things in a new way, or associate ideas that have always walked apart. It is not entirely the effect of the mental vacation, the outdoor trip in imagination, although the effect of that on my alertness is a fact; but there is a real stimulus to my powers of association and encouragement when the keys to the complicated train of ideas are elusive; it is easier to find the form of the equation and to sort the variables."

—H. E. PULLING, Vinalhaven, Maine.

Handshake

IN THIS ISSUE appear—for the first time in many months, two of *Adventure's* old-time favorites, Talbot Mundy and Frederick J. Jackson. Mr. Mundy will continue this series of Ben Quorn, and the turbulent State of Narada. And following the fifth and final tale will start perhaps the finest story of Talbot Mundy's lifetime. It is a yarn of North India and South China—in which appear Jimgrim, Ramsden and the rest of the characters associated with them in the past. Needless to say, I am happy at being able to present these authors again.

Mr. Ferdinand Berthoud is another well liked old-timer who is back with *Adventure*. A short novelette from his pen will appear in an early issue.

Just watch *Adventure*. It is my hope and unswerving intention to make this magazine the best in all the world!

Sincerely—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Power Boat

AIRPLANE motors for salt water use. A hint or two on navigating Old Father of Waters.

Request:—"As I am contemplating a power boat trip down Mississippi, around Florida coast and up to New York, and as I am inexperienced in power boat travel, I seek your advice. My nearest water connection from Palmyra is Sauk City, Wisconsin; or else directly on the Mississippi at Dubuque, Iowa.

I have the problem of securing the necessary boat. I would like one with a cabin large enough to accommodate two cots or bunks. What type of boat and where would I be able to secure one—if possible, a second-hand affair? And what would be a rough estimate of the cost? What would be the necessary navigation instruments, and where could I secure necessary maps? I imagine that there are many peculiar habits or conditions of the river that a person should know before attempting to journey to its mouth. What would be an approximate estimate of the time necessary to reach New Orleans?

I have heard quite a bit about the Curtiss motors sold from the Government field at Dayton. They sell them for about $35 and are 192 H. P. How large a boat do you think they would be capable of running, and do you think they are suitable for such use?"—LAWRENCE KINCAID, Palmyra, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. George A. Zerr:—I believe the best place for you to start from would be from Dubuque, Iowa, as this is one of the big towns along the upper river and you are sure to find something which might suit either your fancy or pocketbook. A boat of the kind you speak of should demand from $200. and up, and yet you might find something which might be just the ideal for your venture for considerably less. But, be sure it is well caulked and seaworthy.

I am not familiar with the trip along the Gulf and the coast, and since you yourself state that you are inexperienced with power boat travel, I would not advise it unless you can see your way through with safety. No navigation instruments are necessary, at least for the river, but write to the U. S. Lighthouse Service, St. Louis, for a book on light aids on the Mississippi River, which will give you the location points and distances. From Dubuque to New Orleans it is 1,565 miles and the trip should be made in less than two weeks. In navigating that river it is well to remember to follow the middle of the stream until you reach the mouth of the Missouri or Cairo, then follow the Bends, as that river is not so mild as you might think.

Airplane motors are good and would decrease in speed on account of the resistance of the water. Such high H. P. should drive a boat of about 40 feet long.

The Dubuque Boat & Boiler Works are located at your starting point and you might gather some valuable hints at that shop.

Wireless

ADVICE to the beginner.

Request:—"I have just begun to learn the Continental or International Wireless code. I know nothing, or very little, about wireless. Any advice or information will be thoroughly appreciated.

1. What equipment would I need to listen in on the trans-Atlantic sending? One amateur says it is easy to get, as it is slow and heavy. Is this true?

2. How much power is required to send or receive one hundred miles distance?

3. What are the requirements one must pass before he can get on the air?

4. Name a good book on the subject in not too technical language for an amateur.

5. I have an aerial for my radio, length 60 ft., lead in about 50 ft., aerial about 40 ft. high. Would this be all right to use with the set?

6. How and where does one take an examination to get on the air?

7. Is one limited to one wave length, or within certain lengths?—JOE DENTROUX, Box 85.

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNichol:—The best way to make good progress learning the radio telegraph code is to have some chap about your own age practice with you at the same time.

1. An ordinary radio broadcast receiver receives radio waves of from about 200 meters to 600 meters in length. The trans-Atlantic radio telegraphs operate at wave lengths of from 10,000 to 25,000 meters. To receive these long waves you would require a special receiver.

2. To send 100 miles a transmitter of 50 watts should be O.K.

3. To operate a transmitting station a government license is required. You must be able to send and receive 20 words per minute, and understand the operation of radio sets.

4. The best book for you to get is "Radio Amateur's Hand Book." Send one dollar for it to American Radio Relay League, Hartford, Conn.

5. The antenna you have seems to be a good one and would be all right for receiving but not for sending.

6. When you are qualified for a license write to the Radio Inspector, Custom House, Chicago, asking for application form.

A sending outfit costs about $100, but you had better study up first so you will know what to buy and what to make.

7. When you can understand and copy code sending you will be better off to copy the radio telegraph sending of the hundreds of amateurs who send on wave lengths of from 40 to 150 meters.

Peccary

HOGS are traditionally considered slothful beasts, but here is a species that is as pugnacious as a bulldog.

Request:—"Can you tell me about the peccary, a kind of wild hog? Are they good to eat? Is it a vicious animal?"—E. SCHIFFEL, Mancos, Colo.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The American pig-like mammal of the genus *Tagassu*, called the peccary, ranges from Texas to Paraguay. Two chief species occur; the collared, which is grizzled, with an indistinct whitish collar, and the white lipped, chiefly blackish with whitish cheeks. They have a complex stomach, a gland on the back, and only three toes on the hind feet. They are nocturnal animals.

These little wild pigs travel in droves and have a leader, and if you kill one of them, let it be the last one in the procession, for if you shoot the leader, and then climb a tree (6 or 8 inches in diameter) they will gnaw that tree down in a few minutes, and utterly destroy your hopes for the future.

The meat of these animals is the best kind of pork you ever tasted; I think a very good business could be carried on by making them into sugar-cured bacon, shoulders, and hams; first making a large enclosure that would hold them, and then using a lure that would bring them inside of the pen, where they could be properly fed so as to fatten them into best condition.

Medieval Armor

SOME details of the fighting costume of a gentleman of Old Italy.

Request:—"Often enough I have helped out *Adventure* fellows, via Camp-fire, etc. Now it is my turn!

Imagine: Place; Italy—Florence, Verona, Padua, etc.

Time; toward end of XIIIth century, era of Sir John Hawkwood.

Questions:

1. Would a select section of his condottieri, mounted, be likely to wear steel defensive armor, "backs and breasts"? (I know that Hawkwood himself, as a knight, would then wear plate armor).

2. Assuming that the men in question were light Italians, not ponderous Englishmen, would their swords still be the heavy straight for cut-and-thrust that came down to them from the Crusades; or would that lot be likely to use the rapier, and the dagger for parry?

3. Would a young man of rank, still in private life, then get his training in swordsmanship via rapier, or what?"

—JOHN PRESTON TRUE, Waban, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—Sir John Hawkwood died in 1393. Assuming you have reference to the later part of the XIVth century, it is hardly possible that his picked men wore breast- and back-plates. The men-at-arms of the last of this century wore a *jaque* or "jack"—a quilted tunic of leather, well padded, or a "brigandine" a pour point covered over with iron plates of various shapes. His arms and legs were protected by a sort of half armor; i.e., *demi-grevières*, *demi-gardes-bras*, etc., which did not encase the limbs but protected them at the more exposed parts. His headpiece would be the *chapel-de-fer* (hat of iron).

This type is recorded in statues as early as the end of the XIIth century and survived, in the pikeman's pot, until the middle of the XVIIth century. In lieu of the *chapel-de-fer*, the *salade* would be worn. The *salade* offered added protection to back of neck and ear region of the head. The name *salade* was probably derived from the Italian *celata* or German *schale* (shell).

The swords borne by Sir John's men would be of the cross-hilted type; straight and heavy blades of the cutting classification, the points being little used. The rapier was developed about 1550 and remained in general use until 1700, so we can safely assume that Sir John knew nothing of this weapon.

A young man of rank would be trained with the knightly sword then in vogue. According to Boutelle, the sword of the foot soldier differed from that of the knight in having a narrower blade. The

knightly swords of the period you refer to were about thirty inches long, the quillons (cross-bar) straight or slightly curved toward the blade; the pommels exhibit great variety, being tri-lobed, conical, pear shaped, etc., while the grip was long and with little swell.

With such a sword the misericorde or dagger of mercy, would be worn. This poniard, with a fine point, was intended to penetrate the joints of the body defense in order to give the coup de grâce to a fallen adversary. Both weapons would be suspended from a hip belt or baldric, the sword on the left, the dagger on the right.

Easter Island

WHAT unknown and mysterious race converted the side of a volcano into a workshop, to carve out of crater ash their curious sculptures—great fragile statues some of which weigh thirty tons and stand up to sixty feet?

Request:—"Will you kindly furnish me with the following information if possible:

1. When, and by whom, was Easter Island discovered and was it inhabited at the time?

2. Are any people living on the island at the present, and what is their means of livelihood?

3. What in general is known about the stone images and other ancient sculpture found on the island?

4. Are there any authentic records as to which race these images and sculpture can be ascribed, how long ago these people lived there, how they got there, and from whence they came?

5. Where did the Polynesians originate from?"

—JOHN O. LEFERINK, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. James Stanley Meagher:—

1. Easter Island was sighted by the Dutchman Roggeveen, on Easter day in the year 1722, and it is from this fact that it receives its name of Easter. There were inhabitants on the island at this time.

2. In the village of Hanga Roa is to be found all that remains of the population, about two hundred natives, who have been gathered together at this place in order to secure the safety of the livestock to which the rest of the island is devoted. The island is now used as a stock ranch and contains cattle, sheep and horses. The island now belongs to Chili and a white man looks after the stock on the islands and generally manages the natives.

3 & 4. The prehistoric remains found on EasterIsland seem to be one of the unsolved mysteries of science. The present natives on the island or even their forefathers it is generally agreed, had no hand in the building of these strange works. They are ascribed to a race unknown who were the original inhabitants of Easter. The only knowledge concerning them are the ruined images they have left and some hieroglyphics which have never been deciphered.

The present natives show no interest in the statues and merely regard them as so many rocks, and whatever information they attempt to give concerning them is largely of a mythical character. The builders of the images of Easter Island must have been a superior race, who had some great purpose in the making of the great statues, and must certainly have had considerable intelligence and a vast energy to accomplish their task. The images themselves range from 37 feet in height, the largest one, down to small specimens of 4 or 5 feet.

The statues were at one time standing on large stone platforms, which were supposed to be the burial places of the dead. They resemble in appearance the paepaes of the Marquesas Islands and are built of stones fitted together without cement. These platforms are found all over the island but principally along the seashore. The burial places are known as "Ahu." It is surmised also that these platforms were not all designed to carry statues, as they differ in type and construction.'

On the great "Ahu" of Tongarika there were at one time fifteen images, and on others only one. No one now living remembers a standing statue, but at Tongariki there still remains a fragment of an image still standing on its bed-plate.

Some scientists claim that the statues were overthrown by earthquake; and others put forward the theory that they were deliberately thrown down during tribal warfare. Of the images on the Ahu, most of them are broken and in ruins and the details of sculpture are to a great extent obliterated by the action of the weather. The ones which were either partially or completely buried offer however good specimens for study when excavated.

The general appearance and form of the images are much alike and represent a half length figure with the hands placed in front of the body close together. The ears are of a peculiar design with the lobes appearing somewhat like a rope, and in some cases with the disk which was worn in them. The images on the Ahu were also provided with a stone hat, cylindrical in form and hollowed out to fit on the head of the statue. The brim of the hat projected out over the eyes. (This is common in native head-dresses.) The material of which the hats were made consisted of red volcanic matter taken from the crater of a volcano. The body of the images were made from volcanic matter also, such as that which is found in the volcano of Rano Raraku (Image Mt.). Rano Raraku is a volcano lying in the eastern part of the island and contains a crater lake.

THE MOUNTAIN is composed of volcanic ash particularly suitable to quarrying. Most of the images have come from here and were transported all over the island. The wonder of the thing is how these images were transported, as there are no trees on the island or other apparent means to haul these fragile statues some of which weighed as much as 30 tons. Up on the grassy slope of Rano Raraku are to be found a series of chambers and ledges

where the rock has been hewn away and here are many images in all stages of carving, just as they were left, when for some unknown reason the workmen ceased their labors.

The large number of images found here also presents a problem. It must have necessitated a large force of workers, more than the population, it is surmised, that the island could maintain. Whether these images were intended to be later removed from here or not is also a mystery. The largest one is 66 feet in length much bigger than any found outside. That they were intended to be removed seems to be borne out by the fact that some of them are actually in the stage of removal. There is nothing known to throw any light on the reason why the work in these chambers was uncompleted and deserted. Thus the mystery of Easter Island still remains unsolved.

Easter Island lies over two thousand miles from the nearest point on the South American coast and almost a thousand miles from the nearest island in the Tuamotu group on the west. It is in the subtropics, between the 20th and 30th parallel of latitude south. The climate is almost perfect, except for an almost constant wind. Insects are numerous such as mosquitoes, moths, flies, cockroaches, etc. The island is of volcanic origin and is about 50 square miles in extent. Easter is not blessed as some of the other islands of the Pacific, and has little to recommend it from the standpoint of beauty. With little vegetation, its wild and lonely grass grown mountains and valleys do not invite like Tahiti or Vavou.

5. The Polynesians or Maoris who were found in the Pacific islands from New Zealand to Hawaii and from the Fijis to Easter Island were a race set apart from the rest of mankind for thousands of years. They are distinguished by a certain uniformity of characteristics which they bear wherever found, whether it be New Zealand. The Societies, The Marquesas, The Paumotus or the Hawaiian Islands.

Thus they are noted for the softness of their expression, their uniform color and their wonderful physique. Although their origin is not exactly known, scholars believe them to be descendants of the ancient Aryan race, who in the distant past were in India and later in the Indian archipelago. They must later have found their way to the South Sea Islands and Hawaii, and all those islands forming Polynesia. The legends and songs of the race all support this theory as well as the names of the different islands which they brought with them. Thus the island of Oahu in Hawaii comes from the Ouahou of Borneo. The Island of Moorea in the Societies from Java. Molokai from the Moluccas, and so on. There are many derivatives of this nature.

That there were inhabitants on any of the islands which were eventually occupied by the Polynesians in their eastward migration is improbable. The race of stone carvers who left the images of Easter Island and also in the Ladrone Islands must have been there thousands of years before the advent of the Polynesian. If by chance the Polynesian had found any remaining of this mighty race they either killed them or possibly absorbed them, for there is no trace of them left and they remain a mystery to the ethnologist and archaeologist.

The Polynesians first established themselves in Samoa but later made their way to the other islands and principally to Tahiti. This island in the center of Polynesia, so favoured by nature, was the source and development point of the race and their language customs and culture reached their highest pitch here. It is thought that the Marquesas, the Paumotus, the Hawaiian Islands and New Zealand were stocked from Tahiti in the distribution of the race.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

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American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

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Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune,* New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram,* 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times,* Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 1011, 2019 E. 73rd St. N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documented steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., Commiskey, Indiana, and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

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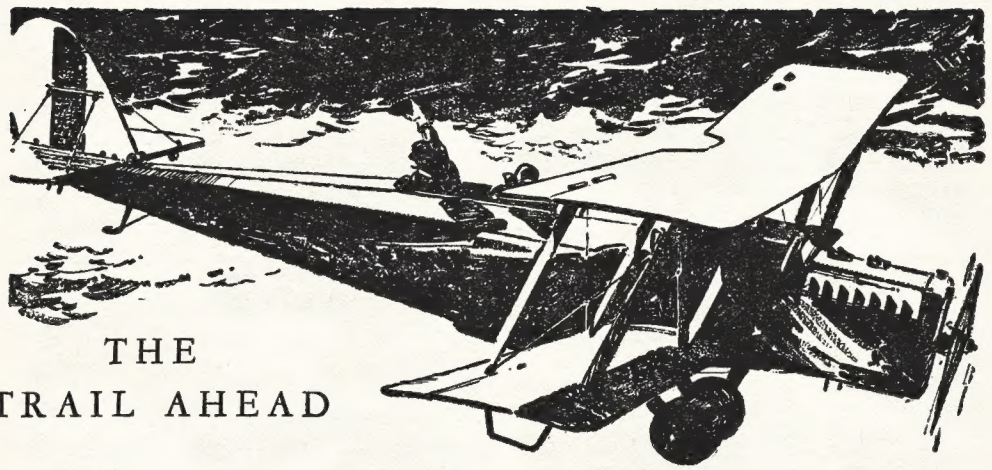

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